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Sermons

BY THE

REV. JOHN VENN, M. A.

RECTOR OF CLAPHAM.

THREE VOLUMES IN TWO.

VOL. I.

FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE THIRD LONDON EDITION.

BOSTON.

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the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

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PREFACE.

IT has frequently been remarked concerning literary men, that their lives afford few incidents which are likely to engage the attention of the public. This observation seems especially applicable to persons who have adorned the clerical profession. The duties which devolve upon them have little of variety and less of ostentation: the pursuits to which they are called are not of this world; and some, that will shine hereafter among the brightest stars of the firmament, have excited little interest beyond their appropriate and limited sphere; so silent was their progress, and so retiring and unobtrusive their character.

Among those who have been most anxious to escape observation, beyond the bounds of their immediate circle, was the Author of the following Sermons. It was his earnest and particular wish that nothing should be recorded of him in the way of panegyric; and his injunctions have not been disregarded. Far be it from the Editors of this work to offend against a desire so humble and devout, and so

characteristic of the individual who expressed it; but they consider it as an act of justice both to the dead and the living, not to send these volumes into the world without some account, however brief, of the departed friend who composed them:—and of such a man, how is it possible to speak in language which shall not serve to record their sense of his extraordinary worth?

The Rev. JOHN VENN was born at Clapham, on the 9th of March, 1759. He was descended from a long line of clerical ancestors; some of whom were remarkable for independence of character, and some for patience and suffering. So far as any knowledge of them is preserved, they appear to have lived in the fear of God, and to have been elevated far above the fear of man. Their profession was sacred; their lives reflected credit upon their profession; and their respected descendant has added new lustre to their fair and honourable name.

His father was the Rev. Henry Venn, well known as a most zealous and indefatigable Minister of the Church of England, and as the author of that very useful and popular work the *Complete Duty of Man*. At the time of his son's birth he was curate of Clapham: he removed afterwards to Huddersfield in Yorkshire, where his labours were abundantly blessed, and he died vicar of Yelling, in Huntingdonshire, on the 24th of June, 1797.

The subject of this memoir received the early part of his education under Mr. Shute, at Leeds.

He was then removed to Hipperholme School, where he was well grounded in classics by the care of Mr. Sutcliffe. He had afterwards the benefit of the Rev. Joseph Milner's instruction at the Grammar School at Hull; and of the Rev. Thomas Robinson's and the Rev. William Ludham's, the last an eminent mathematician at Leicester. He was admitted a member of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he took the degree of A. B. in 1781. In September, 1782, he was ordained deacon, as curate to his father: he entered into priest's orders in March 1783, and two days afterwards was instituted to the living of Little Dunham in Norfolk. On the 22d of October, 1789, he married Miss Catharine King, of Hull, who died April 15, 1803, leaving a family of seven children. In June, 1792, on the death of Sir J. Stonehouse, the former rector, he was instituted to the living of Clapham. In August, 1812, he married Miss Turton, daughter of John Turton, Esq. of Clapham. At this place he resided, with little intermission, from the beginning of the year 1793, to the day of his death.

It would be a pleasing task to enter, at large, into the history of Mr. Venn's labours, and to develop the full character of his elevated, discriminating, and pious mind: but, for the reason already assigned, the Editors will do little more than cite the testimony of two clergymen; of whom the one was the companion of his early life, and the other was intimately connected with him at a time when his mental powers were in their full action and energy, and when, to the zeal and piety which characterized his youth,

was superadded the wisdom of maturer years.—“Mr. Venn,” says the first of these gentlemen, “I consider to have been the oldest friend I had among my equals. Long before either of us went to college we were intimate, being children of parents betwixt whom there existed the most cordial and Christian friendship. After a separation of some years, he came into residence at college, a few months before I took my degree. But as I continued to reside in Cambridge, our intimacy was renewed and increased; and he then discovered that warmth of affection, and that soundness of judgment and principle, which gained him the esteem and love of all who knew him. Through his influence were first formed those little societies of religious young men, which proved I believe a help and comfort to many. At various times, after Mr. Venn’s institution to the living of Little Dunham, I visited him, and witnessed his able, affectionate, and zealous manner of addressing his people. In 1792, he established the Dunham Meeting of Clergy, which has continued to this time: it has proved a blessing to that district, and has led, I believe to the establishment of another, on similar principles, in another part of Norfolk* At the period of his removal from Dunham, his modesty and disinterestedness were eminently conspicuous; and his friendship to me at that time I shall ever have cause to remember with lively gratitude.

*It ought not to be forgotten that Mr. Venn was also the projector and principal founder of the Church Missionary Society to Africa and the East,—a society which by its subsequent progress reflects no small credit on the wisdom and piety which led to its formation.

“As a father of a family I have always admired Mr. Venn; and I hardly ever visited Clapham without being impressed with a conviction that the blessing of Heaven was upon him and his. Nowhere did religion appear in a more engaging form; and the impression which both his life and death must have made upon his children and all his friends, could not fail to convince them that ‘the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’”

Our second extract is from a sermon by the Rev. Hugh Pearson, M. A. of St. John's College, Oxford, preached in the Parish Church of Clapham, on the occasion of Mr. Venn's death.

“We are met,” says Mr. Pearson, “his day to deplore the loss of one of the best and greatest men, of one of the most eminent and useful ministers, whom we have ever known. The all-wise and gracious, though as in many other instances, mysterious, providence of God has been pleased to remove him from us; and painful and difficult as it may in some respects prove, it is our duty, and I trust it will be our endeavour, humbly to submit to the dispensation, and diligently to profit by the various lessons of instruction which it so loudly speaks to us. Known as your late excellent Pastor must be to most of you by the intercourse and experience of more than twenty years, you will still doubtless, expect from me, on this mournful occasion, some notice of his character, some mention of his virtues. Yet if, in the performance of this grateful service, I should

appear, in any measure, to violate that unaffected modesty, that deep humility, which distinguished and adorned his character, and which expressly and earnestly sought to prevent any adequate tribute to his merits, let it not be ascribed to any forgetfulness of this excellence, or to any opposition to his known wishes; but to the influence of emotions which cannot and ought not to be repressed, of claims which cannot be resisted, of obligations alike owing to the great and glorious Being who made him what he was, and to the grateful and affectionate people who esteemed and valued him as he deserved. In truth,

"It were profane
To quench a glory lighted at the skies,
And cast in shadows his illustrious close.

"In delineating the character of our revered friend, it is far from my intention to attempt any thing elaborate or complete; the pressure, no less of time than of feeling, forbids the one; my own real inability, and my regard to what would have been the wishes of him whom we lament, would prevent the other. My only aim will be, to offer such a brief sketch of a few of the most prominent and valuable features of his character, as may tend to excite our admiration of the graces which were vouchsafed to him, and our sense of responsibility for the long-continued exercise of them for our own benefit.

"The Christian Minister, whose premature removal (if the expression may be allowed as to any dispensation of Divine Providence) we are this day met to deplore, was adorned by nature with a sound and powerful understanding, with a rich and fertile imag-

ination, with a correct and discriminating judgment, with a temper uncommonly mild and gentle, with affections peculiarly benevolent and tender. Cultivated, enriched, and exalted as these natural endowments were by the stores of learning, observation, and science, and by 'the wisdom' and the grace which are 'from above,' they united in forming him to all that is most excellent and desirable in the Minister and the Man.

"As a *Minister*, need I in this place enumerate the principal qualities by which he was distinguished? If it be necessary to specify some of them, I would first mention that of which alone he would allow himself to be possessed; *his fidelity in the interpretation and exposition of Scripture*; his integrity in preaching that word of God which had been committed to his trust, that Gospel of Christ of which he was a minister. In the execution of this most important part of his ministerial duty he regarded no peculiar system, farther than as the great doctrines of Christianity are clearly and simply drawn from Scripture, and are embodied in the Articles and Liturgy of that Church to which he was so sincerely and zealously attached, and of which he was so distinguished an ornament. He was studious and careful, therefore, to set before you a complete and comprehensive view of the revealed will of God, giving a proportionate measure of attention to the truths and doctrines, the precepts and examples, the promises and threatenings of Scripture; being anxious that none of those committed to his

care should err from want of direction, should fail for want of encouragement, should slumber from the neglect of warning and exhortation, should 'perish for lack of knowledge.' His doctrine distilled like the dew, and nourished and refreshed those on whom it descended. He fed his flock 'with knowledge and understanding,' and led them to the great and 'good Shepherd,' who laid down his life for the sheep, whom he uniformly represented as 'the way, the truth, and the life;' without whose atonement, righteousness, and intercession, we cannot be forgiven and accepted in the sight of God; without obedience to whose precepts as to the various duties which we owe both to God and man, the imbibing of whose spirit, the imitation of whose example, we cannot be his true disciples; without whose all-powerful grace we can become and can do nothing. In short, 'by manifestation of the truth he commended himself,' as a faithful minister of Christ, 'to every man's conscience in the sight of God; warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.'

"In the discharge of this part of his ministerial office, shall I speak of the remarkable *originality* of your departed pastor; of the rich and copious, and varied streams of piety, truth and eloquence, which flowed from his lips; of that noble and sublime train of thought, which frequently elevated his hearers above the business, the cares, and the pleasures of this lower world; of that spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, which made him occasionally speak of

heaven almost as if he had been there, and raised you for the moment, and I would hope with respect to many, more permanently, to that eminence on which he was habitually seated! In these, and in many other qualities, he will readily be admitted, by all who knew him, to have been unequalled and unrivalled.

“Nor were these his only, if they were even his chief, claims to your admiration and regard. The Lent Lectures, which during so many years were exclusively devoted to the moral and religious improvement of the younger part of his flock, and which have been so remarkably blessed to their spiritual benefit; the Society for improving the temporal condition of the Poor in this Parish, and for providing in some measure for his own unavoidable but lamented deficiency in personally administering to their spiritual wants; the enlargement of the Parochial school; the share which he took in the establishment of a local Bible Society; the plan for the better accommodation of the increasing population of the parish, as to the public worship of Almighty God;—all proclaim his pastoral care and kindness, his practical wisdom, his unwearied and beneficial exertions for the temporal and eternal welfare of his flock.

“If from this brief and imperfect sketch of his ministerial character, we direct our attention to our departed friend, as a *Man*, we shall be equally struck with the extraordinary value of the blessing which we have recently lost.—*Humility*, profound and unvarying humility, the foundation of all that is great and excellent and amiable in man, was re-

markably conspicuous in him whom we are lamenting. Not only was he humble as a sinner before God, ever acknowledging his own unworthiness, and accepting the 'faithful saying' of the Gospel, as the chief of sinners; but humble in his intercourse with men; and with those amongst whom it is most difficult both to be and to appear so, with his associates and equals; not affectedly, however, obtrusively, or painfully humble; but manifesting upon all occasions the most marked yet unostentatious apprehension of his own inferiority; eagerly and cordially allowing and assigning to others a large share of the merit, or the praise, which every one else perceived to be far more justly due to himself; frequently lamenting his imperfections and deficiencies in duty; thinking nothing of his eminent and various services; and willingly performing the least and lowest offices of kindness and love.

"*Universal benevolence, and uncommon tenderness,* were other striking features in the character we are considering.—His love of man was indeed inferior only to his love of God. It was the element in which he moved in his intercourse with others; and the kindness which warmed his heart, beamed forth in his countenance, and was manifest in all his words and actions. This truly Christian temper was steady and invariable, and prompted him to a thousand nameless expressions of it, which diffused an air of peace and harmony, of benevolence and happiness over all around him.

“*Disinterestedness*, a greatness and magnanimity which overlooked all that was envious, little, or selfish, was another admirable quality which distinguished your late excellent Minister, and which could not escape the notice of the most superficial observer of his conduct.

“I might mention the remarkable *soundness of his judgment*, which rendered him so wise and able a counsellor; the singular *sobriety* of his views, possessed as he was of such genius and talent; and the equanimity and well-balanced proportion of his whole character. But enough has been already said, and much more will readily occur to those who have been so long and so intimately acquainted with his excellence, to prove the value of what was once enjoyed, and the greatness of our present loss.

“That such a minister and such a Man should have been thus removed in the midst of his years, and in the midst of his usefulness, is one of those mysteries in Providence, which we too often witness, but endeavour in vain fully to comprehend. ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.’ We may, indeed, consider, that your late Pastor had been long spared to you; that he had taught, and exemplified, and effected much for your benefit; and that he was peculiarly qualified to be an inhabitant of that higher world to which he had long aspired, and for the enjoyment of which he was anx

iously training you. Still there will remain in this mournful dispensation of Providence, much that is painful, trying, and, for the present, inexplicable. In one respect, however, it is calculated to afford us the most important instruction and consolation. During the lengthened and afflicting illness which terminated in the death of our lamented friend, he exhibited an example of the infinite excellence and value of the Gospel, of the solid peace, the firm hope, the joy unspeakable, which it inspires; of the meekness, the patience, the submission, the resignation, the spiritual and heavenly temper of the true Christian; an example which infinitely exceeds the most laboured and finished description of those blessings, and was doubtless intended, as it is eminently suited, to produce the deepest and most beneficial impressions upon our minds.

“The hour of sickness and the bed of death are the times which more especially try the stability of the foundation on which the Christian hope is built: it is then that the real character appears, that the genuine dispositions of the soul are manifest, and that the supports and consolations of Divine Grace are most abundantly vouchsafed to the faithful servants of Christ. It was thus with the pious and excellent subject of these remarks. Living as he had done the life of the righteous, it could scarcely be doubted, that he would in sickness possess his peace and comfort, and in death enjoy his blessedness and hope. Accordingly, your departed Minister afforded a most animating and edifying example

of the reality and power of religion, of the faithfulness of God to his promises, of the triumph of the Gospel of Christ over all the miseries of nature, over sickness and pain, and anxiety and fear, over sin and sorrow, and over the last enemy, even death itself. Our dear and valued friend was exercised, during his illness, with long-continued and excruciating pain: yet, amidst his severest sufferings, no impatient or complaining word was heard to proceed out of his lips. His language was uniformly expressive of patience and resignation to the holy will of God; and once, in the very words of a most devout and distinguished Christian (the learned, pious, and judicious Hooker,) whom in many respects he nearly resembled; ‘Since I owe thee a death, Lord, let it not be terrible, and then take thy own time; I submit to it! Let not mine, O Lord, but let thy will be done.’

“That filial confidence in God, which had ever formed a distinguishing part of his character, was strikingly displayed in his last illness. Few men, perhaps, had stronger ties to bind them to this world, or more powerful and affecting motives to the love of longer life, than your departed Minister: yet all was subdued to the will of God; all was resigned to his infinitely wise and holy appointments. He doubted not the wisdom, the mercy, and the goodness of the dispensation which was about to separate him from the duties of his ministerial service, and the objects of his tenderest earthly affections; and under the influence of Divine Grace he soared above the

present world, and anticipated the society, the employments, and the pleasures of the blessed inhabitants of heaven. Yet as long as he remained in this state of trial he was occupied in prayers for his flock, that the great Head of the Church would bestow upon them a faithful, able, and laborious pastor; for his family, that they might be guided and supported, comforted and blessed; for himself, that patience might have its perfect work; that he might be sanctified in body, soul, and spirit; that he might be guided by the Divine counsel whilst here, and at length be received to glory. Thankful for the abundant blessings he had enjoyed; full of consideration, tenderness, and love to all around him, he looked forward to the hour of dissolution not only without dismay, but with hope and joy. He declared that the light affliction he was then enduring was working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; that the sting of death was taken away; that although he walked through its dark valley, he feared no evil; that the rod and staff of his heavenly Shepherd supported and comforted him; that he knew whom he had believed, and was persuaded that he was able to keep that which he had committed unto him against that day; that, though heart and flesh were failing, God was the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. The language of praise was indeed almost constantly heard from his mouth. Though so frequently tortured with pain, and exhausted with weakness, these were the

strains in which he often expressed his gratitude and love to his God and Saviour.

“I’ll praise Him while he lends me breath;
And when my voice is lost in death
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;
My days of praise shall ne’er be past,
While life and thought and being last,
Or immortality endures.

“I should detain you too long, if I were to detail but a small part of the truly divine and Christian words which proceeded out of his lips, during the progress of his long and fatal illness. What I have just stated will, I am persuaded, be sufficient to convince you, how eminent and undoubted an example your deceased Pastor afforded of the power and excellency of that Gospel which he had so faithfully preached; and how earnestly it is to be desired by every one of us, that we may resemble him in our lives, that so our last end may be like his!

“And here I should at once proceed to exhort you to be *followers* of him as he was of Christ, if I had not a far more interesting and impressive Address to present to you than any which I could imagine. I hold in my hand part of a Pastoral Letter intended to be addressed to you by your late invaluable Minister; dictated not long before his lamented death, but interrupted by the unexpected and rapid progress of disease and weakness. Yet though it is, alas! but a fragment, you will, I am sure, receive it with all that reverence and affection which it so justly demands. It is thus entitled:—

“*A Pastoral Farewell Address from the Rev. John Venn, Rector of Clapham, to his respected and beloved Flock.*

“ ‘My dear Friends,

“ ‘I cannot quit the pastoral relation which I have so long held over you, without expressing my deep sense of obligation to you, and without giving you my last friendly advice. For twenty years I have lived amongst you, and preached to you. With respect to myself, I have humbly to request you to pardon the many deficiencies in my ministry and conduct of which I am now deeply sensible. But with respect to one thing, I can truly say that I have acquitted my duty faithfully and conscientiously. I have taken much pains to understand accurately, and impartially to preach to you, the Gospel of Christ, as it appeared to me to be delivered by Christ and his Apostles. In this respect I have called no man master; nor have I ever, in any one instance that I know of, for the sake of system, given an interpretation to any part of the Word of God which I was not fully convinced, after the most mature deliberation, to be just and right: so that I can truly say, I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.

“ ‘And now, with respect to yourselves, I have to return you my most sincere thanks for your kind, and tender, and candid acceptance of my labours amongst you. I have met with daily instances of attention, civility, and affection; and I cannot recol-

lect, that in the whole course of my ministry I have met with a single instance of rudeness or incivility. You have been ready to forward every good work which I have proposed. With a more attentive audience no pastor was ever blessed: the decency and devotion of your conduct in the house of God have been such as to attract the notice and excite the admiration of every stranger. By your kind assistance and liberality, I have been enabled to complete the three things nearest my heart:—by the enlargement of our School, every child in the parish may be gratuitously taught to read; by the institution of the Bible Society, every family will be supplied with a Bible; and by the erection of a Chapel of Ease (the Bill for which has already passed Parliament), accommodation will be provided for every inhabitant to worship God with facility and convenience. These are blessings which rarely fall to the lot of a Minister in so short a period.

“But now, my beloved friends, when I am standing upon the verge of eternity, and looking forward to the time when you and I must meet together before the awful tribunal of God, suffer me, I entreat you, to warn you, that you stop not short in the mere forms of religion. Suffer me to remind you of some of the principal doctrines which I have ever insisted upon amongst you, and which now, at the hour of death, appear to me to be more important and real than ever.

“The foundation of all my preaching amongst you has been this: that we are naturally in a corrupt state,

alienated from God, and subject therefore to the just displeasure and condemnation of the Almighty; that it is the chief business of man in this life, and his first and most important duty, to seek deliverance from that state, that he may be reconciled to God—

“Here, I regret to say, this interesting and valuable Farewell Address from your late beloved Pastor ends. It bears upon it striking marks of his characteristic humility, faithfulness, and concern for the spiritual and eternal welfare of his flock: and I cannot doubt, that its simple, affectionate, and weighty import will make a deep and lasting impression upon your minds. The long and uniform tenor of his preaching may enable you to conjecture what would probably have been the substance of his advice and exhortation, had he been permitted to have completed this parting address. He would doubtless have repeated, what he had so frequently declared, and on which he had been accustomed so copiously and ably to enlarge;—that the deliverance of fallen, sinful man, was to be sought by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour; and by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, to be obtained by fervent and persevering prayer.”

After several weeks of great suffering, he finished his course on the morning of the first of July, 1813. His remains were followed to the grave by a large concourse of his mourning parishioners, and of his

friends both clergy and laymen; by several of whom it was afterwards unanimously determined to raise a monument to his memory, as an evidence to future times of *his* singular worth and of *their* affection.—It is to be lamented that Mr. Venn prepared no Sermons for the press. The following Discourses were selected from his manuscripts; and may therefore be received as a fair exhibition of his manner, and sentiments, and doctrine. But the Editors themselves are in a measure responsible for any defects which may be discovered in the style. Mr. Venn addressed one of them in the following terms, a few months before he died:—"I request you to point out from recollection, as well as you can, those Sermons of mine which you may think to be the least unworthy of the public eye. I must further trust to your kindness in taking a share in giving them that correction which is absolutely necessary for their publication, leaving as much as you can unaltered, &c." They have been anxious to present this work to the public eye in the state in which they conceive that Mr. Venn himself would have wished it to appear; and they dismiss it from their hands with an earnest prayer that it may be effectual, by the blessing of God, to the conversion and salvation of many souls.

The following Inscription appears on the Monument:—

TO THE MEMORY OF THE REVEREND **JOHN VENN**, M.A. FOR TWENTY YEARS RECTOR OF THE PARISH OF ST. MARK, LONDON.

HE WAS SON OF THE REVEREND HENRY VENN, VICAR OF YELLING;
AND HIS PROGENITORS, FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS, WERE MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.
HE WAS ENDOWED BY PROVIDENCE WITH A SOUND AND POWERFUL UNDERSTANDING.

AND HE ADDED TO AN AMPLE FUND OF CLASSICAL KNOWLEDGE
A FAMILIAR ACQUAINTANCE WITH ALL THE MORE USEFUL PARTS OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE.
HIS TASTE WAS SIMPLE. HIS DISPOSITION WAS HUMBLE AND BENEVOLENT.

HIS MANNERS WERE MILD AND CONCILIATING.

AS A **DIVINE** HE WAS COMPREHENSIVE AND ELEVATED IN HIS VIEWS,
AND PECULIARLY CONVERSANT WITH THEOLOGICAL SUBJECTS;

BUT HE DERIVED HIS CHIEF KNOWLEDGE FROM THE SCRIPTURES THEMSELVES,
WHICH HE DILIGENTLY STUDIED AND FAITHFULLY INTERPRETED.

AS A **PREACHER** HE WAS AFFECTIONATE AND PERSUASIVE,
INTELLECTUAL AND DISCRIMINATING, SERIOUS, SOLEMN, AND DEVOUT:

ANXIOUS TO IMPRESS ON OTHERS THOSE EVANGELICAL TRUTHS WHICH HE HIMSELF SO DEEPLY FELT.

BY HIS **FAMILY**, AMONG WHOM HE WAS SINGULARLY BELOVED,

HIS REMEMBRANCE WILL BE CHERISHED WITH PECULIAR TENDERNESS,
HAVING BEEN SUSTAINED DURING A LONG AND TRYING ILLNESS,

BY A STEDFAST FAITH IN THAT SAVIOUR WHOM IN ALL HIS PREACHING HE LABOURED TO EXALT,
HE DIED JULY 1, 1813, AGED 54 YEARS, LEAVING TO HIS SURVIVING FAMILY AND FLOCK AN ENCOURAGING EXAMPLE
OF THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO EMBRACE WITH THEIR WHOLE HEARTS THE RELIGION OF JESUS CHRIST.

REMEMBER THEM WHICH HAVE THE RULE OVER YOU, WHO HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU THE WORD OF GOD.

WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW, CONSIDERING THE END OF THEIR CONVERSATION; JESUS CHRIST, THE
SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER. **HEB. XIII. 7, 8.**

THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED, AS A TESTIMONY OF RESPECT AND AFFECTION, BY FRIENDS OF THE DECEASED.

SERMON I.

THE IMPORTANCE AND DIFFICULTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

PREACHED AT CLAPHAM, ON HIS INDUCTION.

1 Cor. ii. 3.

*I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much
trembling.*

ST. PAUL had been educated in the learning, and instructed in all the religious knowledge, of the age in which he lived. He belonged to the strictest sect of his religion; had been from his youth blameless in his moral conduct; was converted to the Christian faith by a special revelation of Christ, and appointed by him to be a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. In knowledge of the Gospel, and success in preaching it; in love to Christ, and sufferings for his sake; in spiritual gifts, and the abundance of revelations, he was "not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostle." Nevertheless he observes to his Corinthian disciples, that when he first came to them, it was "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." If such were his feelings, what should be mine?

I am well aware of the caution which is necessary in applying to ourselves any expressions of the Sacred Writers. Without a guarded attention to the circum-

stances in which they stood, there is great danger of employing their words in such a manner as to sanction our own ignorance or presumption. But the text expresses, so exactly, and so feelingly, the sentiments with which I now address you, that I trust I shall stand excused before God and you for my adoption of them.

The language which the Apostle used implies a distressing sense of inability rightly to discharge the duties of his office, and a painful fear lest he should be found wanting. I shall consider the causes which must produce in every Christian Minister the same apprehension. They may be reduced to three principal considerations :—

- I. The importance of the trust reposed in him.
- II. The difficulty of the service itself ; and,
- III. The aggravation of that difficulty produced by his own infirmity and corruption.

I. The Importance of the trust reposed in every Minister may be inferred both from *the good effects produced by a due discharge of his sacred office, and from the evil consequences of a negligent discharge of it.* Let us consider these effects, first, in their most extensive operation.

It requires but little attention to perceive that a very close connexion subsists between the character of a Nation and that of the Ministers by whom it is instructed. Are they pure in their doctrines, holy and exemplary in their lives, diligent in the discharge of their duties, and impressed with a deep sense of the weight of spiritual and eternal things ? The national character will, under the Divine blessing, be in a measure conformed to theirs, and will take the impress of their virtues. Let them, on the contrary, degenerate, and become earthly-minded, sensual, and corrupt : the fountains being thus polluted, the streams will almost inevitably become impure also. And that which takes place in a nation will be found to hold in a parish. Due allowance being made in this, as in every other instance, for the restraining effect of other causes:

the spirit of a Minister will generally be infused into his Congregation. They will rarely be zealous in religion, while he is lukewarm, or altogether careless in the service of God while he is active in it.

But, to view the subject in a narrower compass, let us observe the effect which the instructions of the Preacher may have on individuals.—The Gospel is the great remedy supplied by God for the disorders introduced into the world by sin; and the dispensing of this remedy is intrusted to his Ministers. They are the stewards of his mysteries, the shepherds of his flock, and labourers together with God. He has chosen to commit the treasure of his Gospel to “earthen vessels.” He communicates to men spiritual health by the hand of their fellow sinners, in the same manner as he healed the sick by the hands of his Apostles and Prophets. Wherever, therefore, his Gospel is faithfully delivered, his blessing may be expected to attend it. The sinner will be awakened, grace will be imparted, faith will be strengthened, and hope enlivened. The fruits of love to God, and of cheerful obedience to his law, will be produced; and a spirit of benevolence and charity to man will be diffused. These, even if estimated as referring to this life only, are important benefits; but they become invaluable when referred to eternity. They constitute the purest and most perfect happiness of this world, and are the earnest of glory in the next. But to point out the value of these blessings, is to shew not only the importance of the office of the Minister, by whom they are dispensed, but his responsibility and his danger. Let him ponder upon eternity, let him estimate the value of the soul and the worth of spiritual blessings, and he cannot enter upon his sacred office without fear and trembling.

But, weighty as is this consideration, there is another which appears to me not inferior to it, in estimating the importance of the trust reposed in a Christian Minister: *The honour of Christ, and the glory of his Gospel, are entrusted to him.*—It has pleased God to

ordinary, that the preaching of the Gospel shall be the chief instrument by which the name of Christ shall be made known, and his glory celebrated. Does the Minister of the Gospel duly dwell upon the power and grace of Christ, upon the dignity of his person, and the merit of his death? These glorious subjects will be understood; Christ will be honoured and obeyed; the influence of the Spirit will be sought; God will be worshipp'd through the Mediator, and will receive the fresh tribute of praise for his mercy in the work of Redemption. It is true, that by the reading of the Bible, as well by preaching, the same knowledge may be attained, and the same effects produced: but whatever influence private reading may have upon some individuals, the great mass of society must necessarily either learn the Gospel of Christ from preaching, or not know it at all.

It is remarkable, that although the word of God was already in the hands of the Ethiopian Eunuch, the spirit of God brought an Apostle from a distant part of Judea to communicate, through his means the knowledge of Christ:—a sufficient proof that it is agreeable to the economy of Divine Wisdom to make use of the agency of Ministers for imparting the blessings of the Gospel. But what is man or the best and ablest of men, that he should be thus put in trust, as it were, with the glory of Him who sitteth above all, the Lord of heaven and earth? Well may he, to whom this solemn charge is intrusted, enter upon it in “weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”

Should any one be inclined to think that I too much magnify my office, let him reflect upon the *responsibility* annexed to it.—There is little to be envied, when the post of pre-eminence is the post of extreme danger: for, if God has intrusted us with a great charge, he will demand of us a solemn account of the manner in which we have executed it. “Where much is given, much will be required.” If the Minister, who is sent to be the pattern and guide of the flock, be negligent

or unfaithful, his guilt is great, and his punishment will be severe.

These are the words of the Lord to Ezekiel, and they are applicable to every Minister :—“ Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel ; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die ; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at *thine hand*.” Again : “ When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die : because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered ; but his blood will I require at *thine hand*.” And is it thus with every watchman of God, that he shall not only answer for his own sins, but for those of the flock committed to his care, if he warn them not, nor lead them in the right way ? Alas ! who can enter upon such a charge without fear and trembling ?

II. If the importance of the work of the Ministry must produce a sense of weakness and fear, these emotions will be exceedingly increased if we add the consideration of its difficulty.

It is a difficult service in its own nature. Were the work of a preacher indeed confined to the delivery of a moral discourse, this would not be an arduous task. But a Minister of the Gospel has much more to do. He will endeavour, under Divine Grace, to bring every individual in his congregation to live no longer to himself, but unto Him who died for us. But here the passions, the prejudices, and perhaps the temporal interests of men combine to oppose his success. It is not easy to obtain any influence over the mind of another ; but to obtain such an influence as to direct it contrary to the natural current of its desires and pas-

sions, is a work of the highest difficulty. Yet such is the work of a minister. He has to arrest the sinner in his course of sin : to shake his strong hold of security ; to make the stout hearted tremble under the denunciation of God's judgment : to lead him so to deny himself, as to sacrifice the inclinations most dear to him—to repent, and become a new creature. Neither is the work of the Ministry less arduous in respect to those who are not open and profligate sinners. Self-love, the most powerful passion of the human breast, will render it equally difficult to convince the formalist of the unsoundness of his religion, the pharisee of the pride of his heart, and the mere moralist of his deficiency in the sight of God. In all these cases, we have to convey unpleasant tidings ; to persuade to what is disagreeable : to effect not only a reformation in the conduct of men, and a regulation of their passions, but what is of still higher difficulty, a change in their good opinion of themselves. Nay, further, we have not merely to “wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” “Who is sufficient for these things?”

III. When a Minister, deeply impressed with the importance and difficulty of his work, looks into *his own heart*, to explore the resources with which he is furnished for so difficult a service; there, alas ! he meets with little that does not serve to increase his sense of weakness and to confirm his fears. For it must be remembered, that he is a man of like passions with his flock, inheriting a body of corruption ; that he is, perhaps, deficient in ability, perhaps unfortunate in the natural constitution of his mind; that, at all events, he has to struggle with infirmities, is exposed to temptations, has more to accomplish than others, as well as greater difficulties to surmount ; and that, whilst more will be expected from him, in himself he may have no resources above those of any of his congregation.

Suffer me to enumerate some particulars, which my own feelings suggest as likely to produce an affecting sense of weakness in every Christian Pastor.

A want of wisdom and spiritual understanding, is one of the first things which presents itself.—When the question is proposed, Will you undertake to be the instructor of a congregation in matters of the greatest import; who would not tremble to answer in the affirmative? Consider the various errors which have distracted the religious world; reflect upon the dangerous consequences of error in the way of salvation. Can you hope to discover the way of truth? Can you presume to be the guide of others? To such questions a minister will reply, by entreating his congregation to join their prayers with his, that the Spirit of Truth may lead him into the knowledge of “the truth as it is in Jesus.”

A want of ability in the mode of communicating religious instruction, is another subject of anxiety to a Minister.—There is great danger lest a good cause should suffer by the inefficient or imprudent mode in which it is maintained. An uninteresting manner or an indiscreet zeal, too great laxity or unnecessary severity, may be equally hurtful. When the awful judgments of God are to be denounced, it requires much caution to combine, with manifest hatred of the sin, tenderness to the sinner. There is a limit, not easily to be found, where reproof tends to exasperate, rather than to amend; where it ceases to promote reformation, and begins to provoke resistance.

A good intention will, however, do much to prevent the bad consequences which may arise from want of wisdom or ability. But there is another weakness, more pernicious in its consequence; I mean, *a want of courage*.—To “fight the good fight of faith;” to speak honestly and openly; to rebuke vice wheresoever it appears; to incur displeasure rather than spare a prevailing error; to assert the cause of God in the face of licentiousness and infidelity; perhaps to suffer in rep-

utation, to be misrepresented, to be exposed to ridicule (and to these trials both Ministers and the Master of Ministers have been called).—these things require no little courage. St. Paul entreats the Ephesian disciples to pray, that even he might be enabled to “speak boldly, as he ought to speak.”

But, alas ! want of courage is but one weakness out of many, which spring from the fruitful source of the corruption of the nature of man. This corruption itself it is which is calculated to bring the Minister before his people in “weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” If he asks his own heart where is the ardent love to Christ, the compassion for perishing sinners, the delight in the service of God, which are the qualifications of a faithful pastor ? Where the purity of heart, the meekness, the humility, the heavenly mindedness, the fervent piety, which should adorn the example of the flock ? Such questions impress him with a sense of something more than “weakness ;” and lead him to “fear and tremble,” lest, by his conduct, he should injure rather than assist the holy cause of which he is the advocate.

The account which I have given of the weakness of a Christian Minister is indeed very humiliating : yet there is a point of view in which the contemplation even of this weakness may serve at the same time to encourage man and to glorify God. When the Lord had said to St. Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness,” the Apostle at once founded this conclusion upon the review of his infirmities : “Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me ; for when I am weak, then am I strong.” And the same language may every Christian Pastor humbly adopt. His “strength is indeed perfect weakness,” but he may be strong in Christ Jesus. Christ has promised to be with his Ministers “always, even unto the end of the world.” Encouraged by this gracious declaration, I would trust that the

word spoken in great "weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling," may yet be made effectual, by the power of Christ to "pull down the strong holds of sin and satan."

I have now briefly stated the causes which ought to produce, in every Christian Minister, a sense of weakness and an impression of fear. It will not, I trust, be thought foreign to my subject, to apply what has been said of the duties of the Minister to the practice of his Hearers.

If he, then, is impressed with awe, from a sense of the worth of their souls, ought they not also to consider their inestimable value? Ought they not to reflect seriously upon the importance of their eternal happiness; and to weigh all that relates to their salvation with attention, with impartiality, and with a wish rather to profit by what is said than to criticise the mode of saying it? If, again, the glory of Christ fill the Minister with a consciousness of utter inability to sustain the character of His steward or ambassador; should not the majesty and power of the Master induce you to respect his words, and the doctrines drawn from them, though conveyed by the medium of a feeble and unprofitable servant? If, also, the strict account he will be required to give of his ministry, induce him to labour that he may discharge it faithfully; shall not the sincerity of his intention, and the awfulness of his responsibility, excuse the freedom of his admonitions? And is it not of moment to consider, that it is not he alone who shall render an account of his conduct; and that if the preacher be responsible for his preaching, the hearer must, in an equal degree, be responsible for his hearing?—Again: if the minister is in danger of sinking under the impression of his own weakness and incapacity, is it not the duty of the congregation to interpret both his words and actions with candour and charitable allowance? Ought they not to reflect, that a weak and unworthy messenger may faithfully and honestly convey a most important mes-

sage? Ought they not to weigh impartially and without prejudice the doctrines which derive their sole authority from God's written word although delivered by one neither possessed of any authority in his own person nor indeed ambitious of it? Ought they not to afford him encouragement, not only by a patient hearing of his counsel; but by that best and most animating reward—a ready compliance with it in their practice?

Finally, my brethren, let me entreat of you, that which indeed might have been added to your duties, to join with me in earnest prayer to God that He who “giveth eyes to the blind and feet to the lame;” may preserve me from faltering or fainting in my Christian course; that He who ordaineth strength of praise even out of the mouth of babes, may enlighten me by his heavenly wisdom encourage me by his strength, and sanctify me for his service by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit; that he may look down with mercy on my weak and defective services, and so bless the seed of the word sown among you that it may bring forth a fruitful harvest of righteousness and true holiness; and that thus we may together render up a clear and acceptable account to the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, Jesus Christ: to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c. &c.

SERMON II.

ON PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

Mark xvi. 15.

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.

SUCH was the commission given by Christ to his Apostles, and, virtually, to all who should succeed them. They were to preach the Gospel to all the world; and it was declared, that “he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.”—How momentous was the trust thus reposed in them! They were to be the ministers of eternal life, or of eternal death. With what earnestness were they bound to impress their important message upon the consciences of their hearers!

But *what is it to preach the Gospel?* This is a momentous question, both to preachers and hearers. The Gospel is stated by St. Paul to be the power of God unto salvation unto all who receive it; that is, a dispensation in which the power of God is exerted for the salvation of men. The object of it is the recovery of man from that state of guilt and misery into which he sunk by the fall, and his restoration to the Divine favour and eternal happiness. The means by which this great end is accomplished are made known by the

Gospel: Christ, by his death, takes away the guilt of man, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies the heart. Faith is required on the part of man; and this faith is employed by these Divine Agents as their instrument in effecting their own gracious designs. Hence the Gospel itself is said to be the means of salvation.

There are, therefore, several essential points in which the Gospel may be said to consist; and these I shall endeavour clearly, though briefly, to explain. They respect the state of man by nature; his state as renewed by Divine Grace; and the means by which this renovation of the soul is produced.

The whole economy of the Gospel evidently supposes man to be in a state of sin and guilt, under the just displeasure of God, and incapable of extricating himself by the exertion of his own powers; and it implies that no other means have been provided by God for the salvation of man; every law of God being too pure and holy to be sufficiently kept by human weakness. Man being in this state of ruin, we are informed by Revelation, that it hath pleased God, in great compassion, to appoint a Saviour. He hath sent his own beloved Son to take upon him our nature, and to make atonement for our sins. He hath likewise sent his blessed Spirit to testify of this Saviour, and to communicate the benefits of his salvation to the souls of men. Through this Saviour men are to be restored to the Divine favour, and hereafter to be made partakers of the kingdom of heaven. In the mean time, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, they are to be prepared for this heavenly state by the renewal of their souls in holiness, by the mortification of the body of sin, by their growth in grace, and their conformity to the Divine image.

Such is the general outline of the Gospel. To "*preach the Gospel*," is to make known these truths to men: it is both to declare them in a full and perfect manner, and to enforce and apply them in all their bearings to the consciences of the hearers.

From this brief statement we may form some general judgment on the subject; but, in order to give it additional clearness, I shall proceed to shew *what it is not to preach the Gospel*.

We do *not* “preach the Gospel,” if we represent man as in a state different from that which the Gospel supposes. If we do not describe him as fallen and corrupt: if we do not speak of him as yielding to the power of sin, and therefore obnoxious to the just displeasure of a holy God: we give a false view of the subject,—such a view, indeed, as wholly supersedes the grace of the Gospel.

Again: If, allowing the corrupt state of the human race, we assert that there is sufficient power in man to restore himself by his own exertions, without referring him to the grace and power of God, we do *not* “preach the Gospel.” This is to render the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit unnecessary. The philosophers of old did not “preach the Gospel;” for they pointed out no other means of reclaiming man than the wisdom of his own reasonings, and the energy of his own exertions.

Further: If we so exalt the merit of any righteous acts which man can perform, as to suppose them sufficient to counterbalance his transgressions, and to render him acceptable in the sight of God, we do *not* “preach the Gospel;” for thus also we make the Cross of Christ of none effect. This was the error of the Jews: they had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge: for being “ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.”

Again: If we represent Christ as only an example to mankind, and not as making atonement by his blood for sin: as being a mere man, and not as the “only begotten Son of God,” who came down from heaven to become our Redeemer; we do *not* “preach the Gospel.” For “great is the mystery of godliness”—that is, of the

Gospel—"God was manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, received up into glory."

In like manner, if we do not insist that the great end of Christ's coming in the flesh was to purchase to himself a holy people who should be zealous of good works, to enable them to escape the corruptions of the world, and make them partakers of a divine nature, we do *not* "preach the Gospel:" for we overlook the very design of Christ in coming upon earth.

In a word, if we represent man as in no need of a Saviour, or if we ascribe to him the ability to deliver himself; if we leave Christ out of our view, or substitute any thing in the place of his meritorious death, perfect righteousness, and prevailing intercession, or if we do not insist on the necessity of the sanctifying influence of the Spirit; we evidently do not preach the Gospel: we do not glorify Christ, or exalt his Spirit as we ought: we give false views of the state of man, and therefore fail in rightly preparing him for eternity.

In the several cases I have mentioned, the Gospel may be justly said not to be preached at all; because either some doctrine opposed to it is introduced, or some essential part is omitted.

But the Gospel may also be preached *imperfectly*, and may thus fail, in a considerable degree, of fulfilling the great ends for which it was designed.—This is the case when the several points already stated, as characterising the Gospel, are not exhibited in their full and proper proportions: when either a clear view of the whole is not given, or a distorted image of it is presented; when one part is unduly magnified, and its connexion with the rest is not distinctly shewn; when the outline is not properly filled up; when the points, more peculiarly applicable to the circumstances of the hearer, are not brought forward; or when a close and direct application to the conscience is omitted.

We have hitherto described the mere outline of the Gospel, an outline which it requires much knowledge

and wisdom to fill up. Some further detail, therefore, is necessary.

The Gospel in itself is plain and simple: it professes to be so. It was intended for the poor and unlearned; and therefore, if not plain, must be useless. It was given by God, in all whose works a noble simplicity bespeaks the perfection of the Creator. It was delivered by Christ and his Apostles, who professed to come "not with excellency of speech," or worldly wisdom, but with plainness; and indeed they were the very models of simplicity in all their discourses. However high may be the subjects, they are so simplified by the strong and artless representations of the inspired writers, that "he who runs may read." Moreover, the Holy Spirit is promised to enlighten the ignorant. In short, so intelligible has the Gospel been rendered, that nothing is required but a humble and teachable spirit, a diligent attention to the Sacred Oracles, and earnest prayer to the Giver of all wisdom for his illumination.

But though the truth is thus sufficiently manifest to those who are duly prepared to receive it, there is in men an unhappy blindness of mind, a perverseness of judgment, a corruption of heart, and a regard to worldly interest, which render him incapable of discerning spiritual objects in their true form and just dimensions, and according to their real beauty. Hence it is that even the professed Ministers of the Truth, with the same documents in their hands, with the same words of our Lord, and the same writings of the Apostles before them, have often differed so materially from each other in the character of their discourses, that plain and illiterate men have been greatly perplexed, and have been at a loss to know what was the Gospel.

Some preachers, for instance, have dwelt almost entirely upon the evidences in favour of Revelation. This is, unquestionably, to give a very imperfect view of the Gospel; for, however important it may be to establish these evidences in their full force, this cannot

be considered as constituting the whole, or even the chief part, of the message of the Christian Minister.

Others have been copious in describing the duties of man, and the obligations of morality; while they have very feebly urged, and very sparingly explained, those doctrines which constitute the only foundation of Christian practice; while they have left too much out of sight that Saviour by whose blood alone we can be cleansed from our iniquities.

Others, sensible of this error have fallen into an opposite extreme. On points of doctrine they have sufficiently dwelt; but of Christian practice they have spoken only in general terms, and without adequate explanation.

Others have failed through want of a pointed application of the truths they have delivered. They may have stated the grand doctrines of Scripture, but not in a way to interest their hearers. They have propounded them as speculative points; as if a cold and heartless knowledge of the truth could be effectual for salvation. The animated appeal to the feelings, the close application to the conscience, the tender address, as of a father to his children over whom he tenderly watches, have been wanting; and thus their preaching has been unfruitful.

Another error has been that of not sufficiently filling up the outline. It is the business of the preacher to bring general truths to bear upon individual cases. It is not the constant repetition of the same form, even of sound words, which can be styled a complete delivery of the truth. The truth must be distributed into particulars, it must be amplified; it must be variously elucidated; it must be brought home to the consciences of the hearers, to their lives, to their several trials, to their peculiar circumstances: so that they may clearly and fully understand it. The preacher of the Gospel is to be as the "householder, who brings things new and old out of his treasury:" he is "rightly to divide the

“of God?” he is “to give to each a portion in his season.”

The grand and distinguishing doctrines of the gospel are plain and easy, but they are also most comprehensive. Their truth may be readily acknowledged by all; but to detail and apply them fully is the labour of a whole life. It is easy, for example to admit that we are sinners; and undoubtedly the sinfulness of our nature forms a very important doctrine of the Gospel; but of how small importance is the mere loose and general acknowledgment of this truth! It must be explained. The workings of sin, in its diversified forms, must be pointed out. The numerous lusts of the flesh and spirit which lurk in the human heart, must be stripped of their disguise. The love of ease and of pleasure must be exposed. Pride, whether assuming the character of self-conceit, of boasting, of vanity; or the desire of praise, must be exhibited to view. Covetousness, with its several indications; worldly ambition, in its various shapes; the spirit of impatience, of envy, of resentment, in their secret operations;—all these must be developed, in order that we may truly display the nature and extent of that corruption from which it is the design of the Gospel to set us free. And, without doubt, he who thus exposes sin to view gives also the best proof of the necessity of a Divine Influence on the soul, and is preaching the Gospel as truly and effectually as if he were directly proclaiming the “glad tidings” of forgiveness in Christ Jesus. In like manner, he who largely explains the holy tempers which adorn the character of the renewed man; he who describes the fruits of the Holy Spirit, “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;” may surely be said to preach the Gospel, provided he neglect not to add a clear and full exhibition of all the other parts of true religion. It is owing to a narrow and imperfect view of the Gospel, that we confine that name to the doctrine of faith in Jesus Christ; we ought to include in it all those other doc-

trines which were equally taught by Christ and his Apostles.

It appears to have been the practice of our blessed Lord and his Apostles to turn their peculiar attention to the prevailing faults of those whom they addressed: these they forcibly and directly attacked. Our Lord saw that the Pharisees, for example, were the chief opposers of spiritual religion: he therefore constantly reproved them, and exposed their hypocrisy to the people. He perceived that false interpretations were put upon the law of Moses: he therefore gave a full and explicit view of its purity in the Sermon on the Mount. He "marked how the people chose out the chief rooms at a feast:" and hence he took occasion to rebuke pride, and to inculcate humility. He observed the Apostles to be worldly and ambitious: he therefore frequently commended to them heavenly mindedness, and deadness to the things of this world.

A great part, also of the Epistles was directed against existing errors and vices. A Corinthian is guilty of incest, or disorderly practices prevail in the administration of the Lord's Supper: these require and receive the correction of the Apostle. It is this particularity of detail in the Epistles which renders them so instructive and interesting. It is thus that Scripture becomes "profitable, not only for doctrine," but "for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Apostle, actuated by these views, commanded Timothy not only to preach the word, but to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering;" knowing that "the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but, after their own lusts, should heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." He was to watch against the rising evil, and thus "do the work of an evangelist," and "make full proof of his ministry."

The Gospel, it is to be observed, was intended not only to convert men, but to build them up in the faith.

the love, and the obedience of Christ. Hence we find some difference in the strain of the apostolic preaching, at different times and to different persons. When addressing those who were unacquainted with the truth as it is in Jesus, they declare it to them with all fidelity and plainness. Afterwards, the same Apostles urge, upon the same people, new exhortations, more particularly suited to their actual condition. They “feed them no longer with milk,” as infants, but with “strong meat.” If an Apostle finds, at a succeeding period, that they abused the Gospel of grace to purposes of licentiousness, we hear him sharply reproofing them, and saying that “faith without works is dead,” and that a man cannot be “justified by faith, if it be alone.”

By this accommodation of the instructions of the teacher to the circumstances of the hearers, an admirable pattern is afforded of the manner in which we ought to teach others; for, doubtless, the Apostles as much fulfilled the high commission they received from Christ, when they reproofed sin, unmasked hypocrisy, and rectified mistakes, as when they first delivered the simple doctrine of Christ dying for sinners, and exhorted men to be reconciled to God.

We must guard, then, against an imperfect or partial representation of the truth. Christ, indeed, must always be held up to view as the great agent in our salvation. He must be described as the Spring of all obedience; the son of the system, whose influence will pervade every part; the centre, in which all the rays must meet. But yet the very perfection of preaching consists in filling up this extensive circle, in delivering the whole counsel of God, and in giving to each part a degree of attention that shall be exactly proportioned to its rank and importance. Of the relative importance and rank of these parts a perfect scale is afforded by the Scriptures.

These observations may suggest several useful inferences, with which I shall conclude.

They may, in the first place, serve to correct the error of those who would confine the preaching of the Gospel to that particular class of doctrines which relates to the forgiveness of sins by Christ Jesus.—These doctrines, indeed, are the prominent part of the Gospel, but they are not the whole of it. The office of the Christian minister is much more arduous and extensive than this opinion would imply. It requires a deep knowledge of the heart, with all its movements; and a careful attention also to the state of the hearers. In some congregations, the exposition of doctrinal truths is chiefly wanted; in others, that of the practical parts of religion is more immediately required; and the preacher must adapt himself to both. To preach the Gospel doctrinally, and to preach it practically, may perhaps appear to superficial judges to be two distinct and even contradictory strains of preaching. Such, however, was the case in respect to St. Paul and St. James. Both preached the Gospel with wisdom and ability; both were inspired by the same Spirit: yet to many the one has doubtless appeared to hold a language inconsistent with that of the other. Cool reflection and attention to circumstances, will serve in this, as in many other instances, to reconcile the apparent contradiction.

We may further learn from these observations the necessity of caution in deciding what it is to preach the Gospel.—There are many sources of mistake on this point. Wise, and learned, and good men, have often differed, and even on some questions of importance. Let us not be rash or confident in our judgment. Who has not had occasion to retract errors into which he has fallen? I frankly own that I have varied in my sentiments on some points where I formerly thought that I had truth clearly on my side. I trust that the doctrines I now deliver are those which are clearly contained in the holy Scriptures. I can truly say, they have been adopted after a careful perusal of the Sacred Writings, after much observation of the state of mankind, and much serious reflection. But I would not be

confident that I shall never see reason to alter my judgment in some particulars: though not, I trust, upon any material point. It certainly is my earnest and daily prayer to God, that where I am wrong I may be set right; and that I may both clearly perceive, and faithfully preach the whole truth as it is in Jesus. And this also I may affirm as before God, that I neither deliver any doctrine without a full conviction of its truth, nor keep back any from regard to man. Still I every day see more strongly the necessity of guarding against that spirit which decides upon great points hastily and dogmatically, and without candour or reflection. It is natural for men to form rash judgments. How striking were the instances of this even in the days of the Apostles! Could there be any doubt, while they were yet alive, as to what was the truth, or who were the preachers of it? Yet even in their congregations, and among the persons awakened by them, false teachers arose, who pretended that they knew the truth better than the Apostles themselves; and, strange to say, they were believed and followed! "Lord, what is man?" How blind and rash—how soon carried away by prejudice, or betrayed by a hasty judgment! Let us, my brethren, learn caution and humility.

We may infer, also, from what has been said, that nothing new is to be expected in the preaching of the Gospel. What is new must, on that very account, be false. Yet many persons seem anxious to discover something which was never heard of before; something which is to operate as a charm in effecting their salvation. All that can be delivered by the ablest men has been already revealed in the holy Scriptures; and there truths will be found to be clear in proportion to their importance. Let none of us, then, neglect the treasure we already possess, in order to go in search of something new. Let us take the Bible into our hands, allowing to it its just weight and authority, and it will not fail plainly to make known to us the whole counsel of God.

The desire of novelty often leads to fatal consequences. Many are ever seeking, but never find the truth. Many love to repeat some favourite expression, or to dwell on some favourite topic, to the neglect of more important points. Many cherish a fond regard to doctrines, without attending to practice; while some make use even of religion itself to stifle the remonstrances of conscience. Hence, too come dissensions, in the church. One says, "I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos," and thus, as the Apostle tells us, they "prove themselves yet carnal." It has been the policy of Satan to undermine the church rather than to attack it openly. An avowed denial of any truth would alarm the mind; but the exaltation of one part of the Gospel, to the disparagement of the rest, is not so soon perceived to be equally productive of danger.

Lastly : Let us ever remember that it is the practical application of old and well known truths to the conscience which is chiefly wanted, and from which Satan would divert our attention. What does the mere speculative belief of any truth avail, if it be not brought into effect? You believe, for instance, the sinfulness of your nature:—then, mark it well; trace it through all its windings; cherish tenderness of conscience ; confess your sins before God; be deeply humbled for them; strive against them in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus you will walk in the right way. The hour is at hand, when empty words will not be allowed as a substitute for holy deeds. We may build upon the true Foundation, wood, or hay, or stubble; but that day will try every man's work of what sort it is. God grant that we may then be found to have received the truth in the love of it, and to have brought forth its appropriate fruits, to the glory of God and the salvation of our souls. *Amen.*

SERMON III.

THE GLORY OF GOD.

Exod. xxxiii. 18.

And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

AT the time when Moses spake these words, he had just received a remarkable proof of the favour of God towards him: God had punished the Israelites for the great sin which they had committed, in making and worshipping the idolatrous calves, at the very moment when he was delivering the Law in Mount Sinai. On this account he had destroyed many; he had threatened to visit their sins upon future generations, he had separated himself from them, and ordered his Tabernacle to be pitched without the camp; he had refused to go up with them into the land of Canaan; he had ordered them to put off their ornaments, and, in dread suspense, to await his judgment. In the midst of this indignation, Moses had ventured to prostrate himself before God, and to become an earnest intercessor in their behalf: he prayed for them, and prevailed. At his intercession, God was pleased to promise that he would not deprive them of his protection, but continue the visible tokens of his presence amongst them as before.

Emboldened by such gracious condescension, and mercy, Moses prefers a farther request in which he had probably long, though in vain, sought an opportunity of preferring. "And Moses said, I beseech thee, *shew me thy glory.*"—What! it may be asked had not Moses before this seen the glory of God? Had he not witnessed it when God appeared in Horeb, as a fire in the midst of a bush? Had he not seen it in the Pillar of the Cloud which guided the Israelites in their passage from Egypt? Had he not seen it continually resting upon the Tabernacle and appearing with awful brightness at its entrance? Had he not, in common with all the Israelites, seen it resting upon Mount Sinai, when the glory of the Lord covered the mountain, and the mountain appeared to burn with fire? Had he not seen it, in still greater effulgence, when he was called up into the mount, and entered within the cloud and the glory, and remained there forty days and forty nights conversing with God?—He had; and, therefore it is plain that Moses meant, by the glory he desired to see, something far surpassing the splendour he had already witnessed: something which should be more expressly characteristic of the God of the universe. He wished, probably, to see God in his proper form, under such an appearance as that in which he manifests himself to the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

This request of Moses, it may be, was founded on a misapprehension, both of the nature of the Divine glory, and of the capacity of man to behold it. Yet God was pleased graciously to answer it; at once instructing him in the true nature of the Divine glory, which is that of his moral attributes; and intimating, that, in the present state of man, he was incapable of beholding the proper glory of the Divine Essence. "And he said, thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live." Yet, that he might in some measure gratify the desires of his faithful servant, he added, "Behold, there is a piace by me; and thou

shalt stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts but my face shall not be seen:”—*i. e.* I will give thee such a lowered representation of my glory, as thou mayest be able to bear; a representation which may be compared to seeing only the back of a person, instead of surveying the whole figure.

It is a natural mistake to judge of glory by the outward appearance. Hence we are apt, at first sight, when we hear of the glory of God, to conceive only of some external glory; something bright and dazzling, like the radiance of the sun in the firmament. The glory of God, in this respect, might indeed sufficiently display his infinite superiority to all other beings. His glory, even in this lower sense, is represented by St. John as illuminating the boundless regions of heaven: nor could man any more endure the splendour with which the Divine Majesty might clothe himself, than the eye could endure the brightness of the meridian sun. But from this lower sense of the word it is necessary that we should turn our attention to one which is far more elevated and sublime. Indeed, the aim of all Scripture is, to wean our thoughts from the objects of sense, from what is material or external, and to fix them upon things spiritual and internal.

We rise to a nobler and juster sense of the term, *the glory of God*, when we consider it as consisting in the perfection of his attributes. In these his glory pre-eminently consists. Let us proceed with reverence to contemplate them.—His attributes are either his *natural* or his *moral* qualities.

I. Consider, first, his *natural* attributes.

1. God is *self-existent*.—All other beings are created, and created by Him. He is the great Parent of existence. There was a time when other beings were not; and there was a period when they began to be,

and to possess life and the various powers of life. And they then became, not what they chose to be, but what he made them. Their powers and faculties also are limited and capable of increase. Their knowledge increases, their perfections advance. But God remains the same unchangeable; incapable of increase or progress in the perfection of his attributes. What he is at this moment, he always was, when as yet there was no created being.

2. Reflect next upon his *Omnipresence*:—He fills heaven and earth. He is equally in all places. Other beings reside where he has placed them; in heaven, on earth, or in hell. They have their proper and peculiar sphere of action. He alone has no place, no sphere no limitations. His perception, agency, power and wisdom are operating in every part of the universe, with as much perfection as if they were concentrated in a single spot—as though he were no where present and had no existence but there exclusively. He pervades all things, he comprehends all things; yet is pervaded by nothing, comprehended by none.

3. Survey his *Power*.—He is almighty, and can do every thing. These words are easily used; but what do they imply? How inconceivable is that infinity of power which they attempt to describe! He can do, instantly and perfectly, all things which are feasible. He can act without agents or instruments. All other beings, animate or inanimate, are but his instruments to fulfil his will. He speaks or wills, and it is done. He said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” No other beings can create: they work with the materials which he bestows. They combine and modify these: but they cannot create: they cannot form what they please out of nothing. He needs the help of no other being: indeed, the strength of all other beings, annexed to his own would be no addition to it; for they possess none which they do not derive from him. His powers alone are underived. He is the original Fountain of his own perfections.

4. Contemplate, also, the infinity of his *Knowledge*.—All things in heaven or on earth he distinctly and fully observes and knows. Every truth, in all its bearings, in all its recesses, in all its fulness, is perfectly unfolded to his mind. He knows the smallest things as well as the greatest; surveys and remembers all the actions, and all the thoughts, of every one of the lowest of his creatures, as well as of the highest. There is nothing so minute as to be overlooked; nothing so vast as not to be comprehended by him without labour or effort. Amidst attention to every object in all his boundless dominions, he alone is never fatigued by the intenceness of his observations, nor distracted by the variety of his knowledge. All things are equally naked, equally plain, equally revealed to him. The most secret recesses of the most secret mind lie exposed to his penetrating glance. Nor is his knowledge confined to things past or present. In this it is pre-eminent, that he also knows every thing future. All the thoughts and all the actions of all the beings who shall be living millions of ages hence, are now present to him, with as much certainty as are the events transacting at this moment. Yet no confusion disturbs his mind. He is all mind. It is of the essence of his nature to be omniscient.

5. Consider further his *Wisdom*.—He plans and directs all the events which occur in the universe. His plans are invariably pursued by all the creation, devils as well as angels fulfilling his will; all beings however unconscious, or however averse, acting as his instruments, and accomplishing his purposes. His plans never fail, can never be frustrated. He alone is never disappointed, never deceived, never surprised. All the designs of his adversaries are foreseen, all converted by him to his own glory.

6. View, lastly, the immeasurable extent of his *Bounty*.—By him all things subsist. All creatures in earth and heaven are replenished out of the storehouse of his beneficence. They all wait on him for every

thing they need, and derive from him every thing they enjoy. He gives, to all exceeding abundantly above what they can ask or think, or can ever conceive: he gives freely, neither expecting nor needing a return: yet the treasures of his bounty are not exhausted: they are not even diminished. Millions of generations yet unborn will equally be dependant upon him for the supply of their wants, and will equally partake of his boundless beneficence. Every archangel is as much a pensioner on his bounty as the meanest creature. All creatures are but parts of his family, for which he daily, provides, "giving to each their portion in due season."

And now, when we consider merely these *natural* perfections of the Deity, how sublime an idea do they present of the majesty of his glory! In how many, and in what important particulars do all creatures differ from him; their powers from his powers, their excellency from his excellency, their glory from his glory! The distinction between them is not only great—it is infinite. They do not even approach to him. Their inferiority is not that of degree only—it is that of kind. He is every thing; they are comparatively nothing: he possesses every thing; they possess only what he pleases to communicate. Things of a like kind may be compared; but what comparison can possibly be instituted between finite and infinite, between time and eternity, between matter and spirit? Were all the myriads of creatures which now exist by his power, whether angels or archangels, principalities, thrones, or dominions, to be weighed in the balance against him, they would be found lighter than vanity. All their excellence would be as a drop in the ocean, compared with his excellence and the glory of his perfections. All that he possesses is original, is self-existent, is unlimited; what they possess is dependant, is finite. Hence we see why all creatures ought to seek exclusively his glory, and why he may justly, and without vanity, seek his own. There is, properly speaking, no glory any

where but in God; and whatever glory other beings possess is but an emanation, a spark, derived from him, and communicated to them. It is his glory which is seen and admired in their glory.

II. But the glory of God derived from what may be termed, by way of distinction, his natural attributes, is not the highest description of his glory, or even that in which it properly consists. A being might be powerful, and wise, and bountiful without a disposition to direct that power and bounty necessarily and invariably in a right and proper channel. It is therefore the disposition to make a proper use of power and not power itself, in which true glory consists. In answer therefore, to the request of Moses, that God would shew him his glory, the Lord replies, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." And when in the morning the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him on Mount Sinai, he proclaimed his name: "and the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands: forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation." It was the goodness, therefore, and holiness of God, which distinguished his character, which constituted his peculiar glory, and properly supplied his name. These, indeed, as much excel the glory of mere power or wisdom, as mind excels matter. Let us, then, contemplate these as constituting the real glory of God.

1. His *Goodness*.—The goodness of God is that attribute by which all his other perfections are directed to the best possible end. It is that which renders his wisdom, power, and presence, not only not dangerous, but in a supreme degree beneficial to the whole creation. Now, the goodness of God, like all his other

attributes, is infinite. No one can comprehend its extent, can measure its height or fathom its depth: it "passeth all knowledge." "High as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his thoughts of love and mercy above our thoughts, and his ways above our ways." This is true glory—that the most powerful of all Beings should be the most generous: the most lofty at the same time the most merciful—the most glorious, the most condescending. No finite creature ever was, or can be, as long-suffering and merciful as God. It is the glory of his nature to be exempt from the elements of those passions which tend to diminish the exercise of immeasurable love. "God is love;" pure, unvarying love; love in its essence. No jealousies, nor envy, nor selfishness, nor rivalry, nor private wants, nor poverty of means, can ruffle his mind, or limit the full exercise of his love. But, to understand this subject, we should be translated to heaven. We must see God as he is, and know what he deserves and requires from his creatures; we must understand the evil of sin, and judge of its tendency in its remote effects, if we would learn how gracious and long-suffering, how slow to anger and of how great goodness the Lord is, in passing by the most aggravated provocations of his creatures. Then, and then alone, could we be prepared justly to appreciate the goodness of God. O God of love and mercy! so display to our minds thy goodness and love, that we may ever admire and adore thy transcendent glory displayed in them, and may love thee with all our hearts, and souls, and strength!

2. But the *Holiness* of God forms another principal feature in his glory: "He will by no means clear the guilty." Here, again, we discover a tremendous infinity in his perfections. His justice and holiness are as infinite as his goodness. His mercy is not the weak mercy which cannot punish. He does not threaten, without meaning to execute his threats. No. His punishments are awful, irremediable, eternal. To this part of our subject we must approach with trembling. How terrible

is his wrath! It is the wrath of the Almighty! Here, like the angels who are represented as singing "Allelujah" while the smoke of the torments of the condemned ascends, we must adore what we dare not contemplate, and submit to what we cannot avert.—Yet, let me suggest that the holiness of God, however pure, and his justice, however severe, may be the mere modifications of goodness—inseparably connected with it, and indispensably necessary to its very existence. For what is *holiness*, but the supreme regard to what is just and right? It is equity in the highest perfection. It is the security of the creature, that the power of the Creator will never be abused—never misemployed. It is the defence and the ornament of goodness. It is goodness directed to the purest and best ends—goodness enlightened by reason and sanctioned by wisdom. Holiness is therefore the glory even of goodness itself.

3. But is *Justice* also a modification of goodness? Yes, strictly so. It is the pledge of its being continued to the creation. Justice towards some is the security of all. Were an indiscriminate mercy to be shewn to all, sin would prevail, and soon prostrate the mercy of God, and efface from the universe every trace of his goodness. That God may continue to be merciful, he must be just. That the universe may enjoy the most perfect and lasting happiness, under the mild effulgence of paternal kindness, it is absolutely necessary that vice should be eradicated and the offender be deprived of the power of contaminating others. Justice to a few is, in fact, mercy to all. Nor let it be forgotten, that his mercy and holiness, thus guarded by his justice, become in their turn the guards of his justice itself. His wisdom directs his justice, his mercy guides and proportions it. In such hands and with such guards, who will ever arraign his equity, or doubt the continuance and perfection of his love?

Thus, my brethren, have I ventured, under the consciousness of that ignorance and infirmity which must

attend all human endeavours upon such a subject, to direct your attention to the glory of God. But though the subject is infinite, and infinitely transcends all human powers, it does not follow that we ought not to study it, and to endeavour to familiarize ourselves with it.

In every thing which relates to God, we find ourselves ever learning, yet never able to come to a perfect knowledge. And this is, perhaps, the condition even of angels. Even they may only know in part, and comprehend in part, the glory of God. Their knowledge of it is perpetually advancing, their admiration enlarging, their adoration of it becoming more profound. Like them we must endeavour to adore what we cannot comprehend, and to study what we can only imperfectly understand. And we are encouraged by the example of Moses in this pursuit. The desire to see the glory of God, though evidently conceived and expressed under some misconception of its nature, was acceptable to God, and rewarded by the noblest conceivable display of the Divine nature. And thus every attempt to know God better, and to love him more, will be accepted and rewarded by him. Abraham desired to see the day of Christ, and "he saw it and was glad." Let us then pray earnestly that we also may behold the glory of God.—But where is it to be contemplated? I answer, Revelation is intended to display it. In the Gospel, especially, we see, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. There an exhibition of it has been presented, such as even to astonish the angels, and make them stoop from heaven to contemplate it. Would you see the glory of infinite Mercy and infinite Love transcendently displayed? Behold Jesus Christ; see the Son of God freely given by the Father to dwell with us, to suffer for us, and to bring us to glory. In Christ is the Divine glory transcendentally displayed. He was the "brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person!" He that hath

seen Him, hath seen the Father." Let us then study to know the glory of the Gospel. In that we shall perceive the glory of the Lord: and as the face of Moses, when he beheld this glory on the Mount, was illuminated by it, so we "shall be changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of the Lord." The knowledge of God is to be our grand study through eternity. Here then, in this lower school, let us begin as Christians, to learn the lesson which as glorified spirits we shall perfect in the realms of glory.

SERMON IV.

ON GOOD WORKS.

James ii. 24.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

YET St. Paul (Rom. iii. 28) says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." How are these declarations, apparently so contradictory, to be reconciled?

I am far from thinking the pulpit a proper place for the discussion of religious controversies, or even for a very critical and minute inquiry into the true sense of obscure passages of Scripture: yet when it is considered that the subject treated of in the text is one of the most important in religion; that the supposed contradiction between the two Apostles has served as an occasion of reproach to infidels, and of doubt to sincere but unestablished Christians; and that the removal of a difficulty in any doctrine, or the solution of an objection against it, often tends to give the clearest and most complete views of it; I hope I may be permitted to devote the present discourse to the subject of the text, and the reconciliation of the language of the two Apostles.

The doctrine of St. Paul, respecting justification, can scarcely be mistaken. He largely and expressly teaches that “by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified” in the sight of God—that we are therefore justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus;—that we are “saved by grace through faith,” “not of works;” that “to Him who worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness:—and finally, that “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.”

On the contrary, the doctrine of St. James, as stated in the text, may appear to be, that it is not by our faith only, but by our works also, that we are to be justified. “Can faith,” he asks, “save a man?” “Ye see how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

In what sense this is to be understood I shall endeavour to shew, first premising two observations, which may tend to prepare us for better understanding the meaning of the Apostle James.

I. In the first place, then, it is to be observed, that the two Apostles appeared to have had different objects in view in their respective declarations concerning justification. St. Paul is treating on the method by which a sinner may have his sin forgiven, and become partaker of the salvation of Christ. This the Apostle asserts to be “by faith,” in opposition to any merit of his own. He does not, therefore, take any pains to prove that this faith must be a sincere faith. This the question did not lead him to consider, and he properly assumes that the faith, to which so much is attributed, will be a true faith. The scope of his argument is, that this favour of being admitted to partake of the benefits of Christ’s redemption, was not to be considered as a just reward of any man’s merit, but only as the effect of the free grace and mercy of God. Now, was this also the intention of St. James? No—he had a distinct object in view. His object was to prove that the faith

which saves a man must be a true and operative faith. The doctrine which he opposes is not that a man will be saved by faith, but that he will be saved by a barren and useless faith. The persons of whom he is speaking, are not those spoken of by St. Paul who have not been admitted into the church of Christ, but those who, though they have been long members of the Christian commonwealth, yet, through an insincere faith, are still living in sin.

2. I observe, secondly, that it is probable the two Apostles, in treating of this subject, *use the several principal terms in the same sense*. When they both use the word "justify," it is not probable that they should mean two different things. Besides, they both consider the word *saved* as having the same signification with being justified. Thus St. James says, "Can faith *save* him?" And St. Paul in the same manner, says in one place, "By grace ye are *saved* through faith, not of works;" in another, "We reckon a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." The term *works* appears also to have the same signification with both the Apostles. The works which St. James means are evidently moral works, for he has given an instance of them. In like manner, St. Paul says, in one place, "not by works of righteousness which we have done;" and in another, "By the deeds or works of the law we cannot be saved, because 'by the law is the knowledge of sin.'" Now, it is not the ceremonial but the moral law which chiefly produces the knowledge of sin; and it is from the moral law he quotes his examples of guilt, to prove that the law condemns instead of justifying. I conclude, therefore, that both the Apostles mean the same thing by "works" viz. works done in obedience to the moral law.

If, then, the Apostles understood the same thing, by both the terms "justification" and "works;" and if one Apostle asserts justification to be by faith, and the other by works; the question recurs, "Do they not contradict each other?" I answer: In words they may appear to

do so; but then this circumstance must be taken into the account, that an author's meaning is to be collected rather from the general sense of a passage, than from a few detached words in it. The sense of the Apostle James, as collected from the whole scope of the passage, is not doubtful, and evidently so far from being contrary to St. Paul's idea, appears strictly to accord with it. Should there, therefore, be any detached words which appear discordant with this sense, these should be interpreted according to the sense of the whole, rather than the sense of the whole be changed to accommodate them.

Permit me, therefore, to offer a brief paraphrase and comment upon the Apostle's words, beginning at the 14th verse, in which the subject is introduced. I would be far from asserting that the interpretation I give, is, in all points, right; or that it will in all parts, especially in the first instance, appear obviously just, but it is such as appears to me to accord with the general scope of the passage, and to be the natural deduction from the words, even though there were no desire to reconcile them with the statement of another Apostle.

The Apostle, at the beginning of this chapter, had been reproofing the conduct of certain persons in the church, who despised the poor, and observed the laws of God in a partial manner. "My brethren," says he, "hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons." "If ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted," or reproofed, "by the law as transgressors." For "whoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point he is guilty of all." That is—whoever shall be partial and defective in his obedience, keeping some branches of the law, but breaking others, he is to be esteemed a transgressor of the law, although he may, in some respects, observe it. This is what introduces the subject; and the introduction may be considered as the key to the whole. The Apostle is, therefore, led to this subject by justly

censuring the partial and defective obedience of some hard hearted and proud professors of Christianity.

He then proceeds in the fourteenth verse, "what doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works: can faith save him?"—*i.e.* Let not any Christian think his faith sufficient to justify him, without those works of justice and charity of which I have spoken. "For what doth it profit if a man say he hath faith," *i.e.* in words profess to have faith in God or in Christ, and "have no works" to evidence the truth of that profession: can such a naked, fruitless faith save him?

Much stress is here to be laid on the expression, "if a man *say he* hath faith." The question is not, "What doth it profit if a man hath faith and have no works;" though this might have been truly said, and understood consistently with the system of the Gospel; but the Apostle forbears to employ so strong an expression, and merely asks, "if a man *say he* hath faith;"—evidently meaning, that he merely *says this*, without any foundation for so saying;—can such a pretended or false faith save him?

Here then we see what it is the Apostle condemns. It is the dependance, not upon a true, but upon a false faith. He then adds, verse fifteenth—"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," *i.e.* make profession of good will towards them but, notwithstanding "ye give them not those things which be needful" for the clothing or feeding of the body, what doth it profit them to hear your kind words? Would it not be a mere mockery, if your pretended compassion issued only in fine words and a courteous manner towards them? Even so faith professed with the mouth, if it hath not works answerable to that profession, is dead and fruitless as these words; "being alone," being, that is to say, unaccompanied by works to shew its reality.—The illustration which the Apostle here produces of the folly of pre-

tending to love without deeds to prove it, clearly develops his idea respecting faith. You do not condemn the quality of Christian love, because a pretender to it will suffer his brother to starve; but you justly condemn the man, and deny that he possesses this love. Even so, when a man "says he has faith," but has no works to demonstrate it; you would not condemn faith, but this pretender to faith, and reprove him by saying, that "faith without works is dead."

We now come to the eighteenth verse. "Yea a man (an opposer of the Christian faith, as a Jew, for instance,) "may say" to such an empty pretender to faith, 'Thou boastest that "thou hast faith, and I have works; shew me thy faith" (to which thou pretendest) "without thy works," if thou art able. For my part, I will prove the superiority of that faith which thou despisest; because "I will shew thee my faith by my works."

"Thou believest that there is one God. Thou (in this) dost well; but if this faith has no influence upon thy conduct, what is it more than "the devils" possess? "The devils believe" in the power of God, and their faith has some influence upon them; for "they tremble." Can thy pretended faith, which has less influence on thee than even that of the devils, save thee?

Verse 20. "But wilt thou know," he then adds, "O vain man!" who makest profession of such a naked faith, "that faith without works is dead," is a mere nullity? Is it therefore such a faith as this which will justify thee?

He then comes to the example of Abraham. "Was not Abraham our father justified," not by such a lifeless fruitless faith without works as you possess, but "by a faith which produced "works" (for such I take to be the sense of the passage, though the detached words might not seem to convey it) when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works," to produce them, "and by works was faith made perfect?" And the Scripture was ful-

filled which saith, Abraham believed God, and *it* (this faith) was counted to him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God!"

The argument respecting Abraham appears to be this:—God had promised to Abraham a son. Abraham steadfastly believed that promise though it was most unlikely according to human appearance, to be fulfilled. And we are told, in the Book of Genesis, that God so approved of this faith, that "he counted it to him for righteousness."—From these words St. Paul infers that Abraham was justified by faith; the expression, having righteousness imputed to him, being equivalent to "being justified." And from this use of the example of Abraham, by St. Paul, against the Jews, as establishing the power of faith to justify, the argument had probably grown familiar with the Church, and might be misinterpreted by the false professor whom St. James reproves, as though it authorized his want of works.

What then is the object of St. James in producing this example of Abraham? Did he wish to contradict the Old Testament;—to contradict it also in that part which was used as an important bulwark of the Christian Church? Did he mean to assert in contradiction to Moses, that Abraham was not justified by faith but by his works? If he did, why quote the very Scripture which makes against him, and why speak of its being fulfilled, but upon the supposition that the object of the Apostle in the preceding verses is what I have shewn it to be? There he quotes the example of Abraham as a case full in point to strengthen the assertion just made, that a faith not productive of works is useless or dead, and therefore will not justify. On this supposition the example he produces is important and the declaration of Scripture in harmony with it. It is to this effect;—Abraham was justified by faith. But consider the character of his faith. Was it not so powerful and active a principle, that under the most trying circumstances, he stood ready to sacrifice his child to

God? Was he, therefore, justified by a fruitless faith? Or by a faith which produced works? "Seest thou not how his faith wrought by his works," constraining him to produce them; and that thus his faith was completed, was rendered perfect, by his works? Thus the Scripture was fulfilled which said, "Abraham believed in God, and his faith was imputed to him for righteousness;" and thus, on account of his faith, so manifested by works, he was called the friend of God.

The Apostle then adds, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." This is the conclusion from the case of Abraham, and can therefore mean no more than is warranted by that case. Suppose it to mean, as the words detached from the context would seem to mean, that it is not faith by which a man is justified, but works. In this case the example of Abraham, and the quotation from Genesis are both foreign to the purpose. In this case there could be no occasion to particularize the kind of faith by the adverb *only*, or alone. But on the contrary, suppose the Apostle to have the same object in view throughout; viz. to convince a false professor of the worthlessness of an empty faith; and that he quotes the Book of Genesis, which says that Abraham's faith saved him, in order to strengthen his argument, and concludes from it merely what is necessary to his main object: then, we shall also interpret the last verse in conformity with the general scope of the passage. We shall conclude that the Apostle intends merely to prove, that a barren faith will not justify: that a man is justified by works, *i.e.* by a faith productive of works, instead of a faith which is without works or alone.

In like manner must the example of Rahab be understood. St. Paul asserts her works also to have been done by faith. And St. James maintains, that her faith was evidenced or illustrated by the acts of receiving the messengers and sending them another way.

Thus also, in consistency with the general scope of the subject, must the remaining verse be understood—

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” The expression is equivalent to that which the Apostle had previously employed with respect to faith. Faith can no more subsist without works than the body can when the spirit is fled; than the principle of Christian love can prevail in the heart without prompting it to deeds of benevolence and affection.

Such appears to be the general meaning and object of this important passage and such the harmony between the two Apostles.—I shall conclude with a single observation. Whatever be the difficulties discovered in this passage, one truth it most obviously teaches, that faith, to be genuine, must produce good works. It must be a principle from which they spring, as the effect from its proper cause. Hence, then, we should surely be led to inquire into the influence which our principles have upon our conduct. What effects do they produce in us? Wherein are we more excellent than others who have no faith? What is the benefit of barren and speculative opinions? They may be just in themselves; but so is the faith of devils; that faith which serves only to plunge them in deeper perdition. Nor is this admonition of small importance. Many are more solicitous to form their creed than to purify the heart. As if the essence of religion consisted in correct opinions; as if their salvation were suspended exclusively upon a barren belief, they rest there. For this purpose they read, they listen to the Minister of the Gospel, they inquire with eager curiosity into the various sects in religion; as if some tenet were thus to be discovered, the reception of which would operate as a charm, and at once recommend them to God.—Far, indeed, is this from the true genius of Christianity. True faith is the cordial reception of the Gospel of Christ. It is inherent in the very nature of the Gospel, that whosoever really believes it will do what is right in the sight of God. The various objects of a Christian's faith will each excite its corresponding virtues. Belief in the ho-

liness of God will create a devout fear. A belief in the love of Christ will produce a reciprocal love to him. The reception of the Son of God as our Saviour will lead us to keep his commandments and faith in his atonement will not only fill our souls with peace, but will lead us to adorn the Gospel, and to exalt that Saviour who is the source of all our hope and joy. Such is the power of faith as a principle of action. It moulds us into a state of conformity with the whole will of God. It works by love: it purifies the heart: it teaches us to live to him who died for us: to “glorify Christ with our bodies and souls, which are his.”

SERMON V.

THE PRAYER OF ST. PAUL FOR THE EPHESIANS

Ephesians iii. 14—19.

For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

WHEN St. Paul wrote these words he was a prisoner at Rome, and expected soon to suffer death. His sufferings and bonds were the consequences of his preaching the Gospel. Had he remained a Jew, he might have continued to live in ease, and to enjoy the respect of the world. But no painful reflections on account of his sufferings appear to have haunted his

mind. On the contrary, it is remarkable, that in none of his Epistles do we find higher commendations of the Gospel, nobler descriptions of its privileges, and stronger evidence of his "glorying" in it, than in those which were written during his imprisonment at Rome. In the Epistle, for instance, from which my text is taken: we find one of his most animated descriptions of the happiness of true Christians and then, with his heart enlarged by the contemplation of that heavenly inheritance and those Divine blessings of which they were partakers, he suddenly adverts to his own situation as a prisoner. With a noble disdain of his personal sufferings, he exhorts the Ephesians not to be distressed by them: "I desire," says he, "that ye faint not at my tribulation for you, which is your glory." And that they might still further be strengthened to regard all sufferings whatever as unworthy to be compared with the glorious privileges of the Gospel, he pours forth the fervent aspirations of his soul to God in their behalf in the interesting words which I have chosen as my text.

"For this cause," says he, "I bow my knees:" for this cause,—namely, that the disciples might not "faint," at his or their own "tribulations;" that they "might take joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" that they might rejoice "they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake;" that they might gladly "suffer the loss of all things for Christ, and count them but as dung, or dross, for the excellency of the knowledge of him."

We are all, my brethren, "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." If even we do not suffer from the persecution or oppression of wicked men, still we must suffer from other causes: and is not that man blessed who possesses a sure resource under every trial; who is lifted above it, by an elevation of soul arising from the contemplation of privileges and happiness in comparison of which all that mortals can endure here is a mere trifle? Such a superiority to the trials of life is to be attained through faith in Christ and the knowledge of

his Gospel. These it was the prayer of the Apostle that the Ephesians might obtain.—Let us follow the Apostle in his petitions and lift up our hearts to the God of all grace, to impart to ourselves the blessings which were desired for them.

He thus commences: "*I bow my knees,*" in prayer.—Prayer is the source of the Christian's strength. The dispensation under which he lives is a system of intercourse between God and man. Man approaches his God, and spreads before him his wants, his dangers and his sufferings; and God communicates to him, from heaven, mercy, grace and strength, as the answer to his prayer and the fruit of his faith.—Oh! think not by the resolutions of your own will, by the mere exertion of natural fortitude, by the force of moral considerations, or even by the mere speculative knowledge of the Gospel system and its powerful motives, to endure afflictions as a Christian. No. The knowledge which is efficacious must be acquired by frequently "bowing the knees" in prayer. It must be imparted from above, by the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Be not satisfied, then, with merely listening to the preaching of the Gospel, and endeavouring to understand its theory; but, by earnest prayer to God, seek to have its great principles deeply impressed upon your hearts, and made effectual by the power of his Spirit.

"*I bow my knees,*" he continues, "*unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The blessed God has many titles by which he may justly be addressed: but there is no one which could be chosen with more propriety in offering up such a prayer as this, than that which the Apostle has employed. The object of the prayer is, that the "Holy Spirit may strengthen us;" that "Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith;" and "that we may know his love." How properly, then, is God addressed by the title of the "Father of Jesus Christ!" It is He who, with the Son, sent the Spirit. He sent the Son to be our Saviour, and the object of our faith. His love was the same with that of the Son:

for it was the father who planned that wonderful scheme, the redemption of fallen man by the death of his Son, which the Son afterwards executed.—And here, my brethren, allow me to observe, that it is not always a matter of indifference by what title we address God in prayer. The title is, in a measure, significant of the views with which we regard him. To regard him merely as a wise, a just, a holy, an almighty Being, as the Governor of the universe, or as the Judge of man:—this, though a just, is not the proper Christian view of the Most High. Taught by Christ, we draw nigh to him in “the spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father!” We approach his throne as children: we feel the sentiments of filial confidence, of holy boldness, of grateful affection, of lively hope, and of thankful exultation. We address him as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and, in that character as our own Father through Christ, who was partaker of our flesh;—as the Father of Christ, and therefore the Father of love and mercy;—as the Father of Christ, and therefore the Author and Giver of all spiritual blessings in him. What hopes does not this title express! May our hearts be deeply affected by it whenever we “bow our knees” to God in prayer!

The Apostle, having thus addressed God as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” adds next this description of God, that “*of him the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*”

The Church of Christ below is considered as a “family.”—“A family” is a term which conveys every tender and endearing idea. It supposes a society sprung from one common parent, and united by the strongest bonds, dwelling with each other in harmony and peace. And such a society is that of Christians, when they are truly partakers of the spirit of the Master they serve. Of this family there are two branches, men and angels; both sprung from one common Father; disunited and separated for a time by sin, but now made one in Jesus Christ;—angels ministering to the

heirs of salvation; angels waiting to receive the souls of the faithful, to be incorporated into their own blessed society. Of him, then, this whole "family in heaven and earth is named." He is become the illustrious Head of both: he is their common Lord. They derive a common glory and dignity from the relation which they bear to him. They look up with a common confidence to the Great Head of the family in earth and heaven; and, through him, to that Father who loves them for his sake.—How do those, my brethren, disparage Christianity, who fail to acknowledge the admirable dispositions it has a tendency to create! What a spirit of love and good-will to our fellow-Christians does it instil, by teaching us to regard them as members of the same "family!" What a dignity does it impart to the poorest creatures around us, when we regard them as united to the family of angels above! And what a feeling of holy courage and confidence does it inspire, when we look up to Him who is the Head of the family, even Jesus Christ, who, from love to man, took our nature upon him, and became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh!"

We now come to the petitions contained in this prayer. The first petition is, that God would "*grant them, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*"—The Spirit of God is the Source of all strength in the Christian. Man, in himself, is a feeble creature, yielding to the slightest temptation, falling before the most trifling opposition, dismayed by the most insignificant dangers. It is therefore the office of the Holy Spirit to receive him, when engrafted into the family of Christ, as his charge; to enlighten him with knowledge; to open his understanding to the truths of the Gospel; to affect his heart by those powerful motives which it suggests; to incline him to adopt those principles which it proposes.

And the spirit "*strengthens us in the inner man.*"—The heart is the seat of pure principles and holy affections; and it is the heart which the Holy Spirit puri-

fies. All external reformation, while the heart is unaffected, is but hypocrisy or self-deceit. All appearance of fortitude, either in resisting temptations or in bearing persecution, is but a vain shew, unless "the inner man" be fortified with holy principles, and be strengthened with Divine aid. But if "the inner man" is cleansed, the outward man will be pure, and will appear to be so.—'The spirit strengthens us with might more than human: with might sufficient to bear whatever we may be called to suffer for Christ's sake: with might to resist temptation to overcome our corruptions, to mortify our fleshly appetites, to "pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand." With what might were the primitive Christians endued, when they "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and were tortured, not accepting deliverance!" With what might were women, the feebler sex, strengthened, when they encouraged their children to suffer death even in their own presence, rather than deny Christ! With what might are the disciples of Christ strengthened, when inveterate habits are resisted, the besetting sin subdued, the strongest passions of the soul controlled; when they, who, like the Corinthian converts, were once "unrighteous, idolaters, fornicators, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners," become sanctified, holy, pure, heavenly-minded, sober, temperate, full of good-will towards their fellow-creatures!—Behold, then, my Christian brethren, your lofty privileges! We do not call you to "mortify the flesh" by your own unassisted resolutions:—but we bid you expect aid from above; we bid you look to Him, who is the Author of all strength and grace, to "work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure," that, by Him, you may escape the corruptions that are in the world, and be made partakers of a Divine nature.—Nor, my brethren, let the other clause of the passage I have read to you be forgotten. The Apostle prays that all this may be done "according to the riches of Divine glory." The glorious power of God is displayed, his inscrutable wisdom magni-

nied, his unsearchable grace honoured, when the sinner is thus endued with Divine power, and "strengthened with might" by the operation of his Spirit. O! let not the animating consideration, that, while you contend for salvation, God himself is interested in your success, and that his grace will be glorified by it.

The next petition of the Apostle for his disciples is, that "*Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith.*" Christ may be justly said to dwell in the hearts of his people, either by his Spirit, which he has given them, or by his doctrine abiding in them. By virtue of their union to the Spirit, they become one with Christ and Christ with them. It is not, however, I apprehend, this union, which the Apostle here makes the subject of his prayer; for this has already been requested in the former petition. I rather understand it of the doctrines of Christ. Thus our Saviour says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And in like manner St. John: "He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Son and the Father." Let us, then, consider the full import of the doctrine of Christ "dwelling in the heart by faith." It supposes a clear and lively apprehension of Christ—in his glorious person, his infinite love, his meritorious death, his kind offices,—to abide in the heart—that is, to make a deep impression on the heart—to remain fixed there as an object perpetually present. It supposes the mind to be deeply penetrated with a sense of his infinite importance to the soul; to place a constant dependence upon his merit and promises; to study continually his word and commandments; to be perpetually looking to him for grace and mercy in every time of need. When Christ thus dwells in our hearts, as the object of our frequent meditation and our lively faith, his person and his name will be received by us with entire veneration; our obligation to him as a Saviour and Redeemer will appear to require every sacrifice which he demands, and every proof of attachment which can be shewn to him. In

our prayers, then, we should have respect only to *his* mediation. In our thanksgivings, his worth and his blessings will inspire our hearts with gratitude and our tongues with praise. When oppressed with trouble, we shall look to Christ for succour, and be comforted. In combating with our corruptions, it will be from the intercession and aid of our Saviour that we shall expect strength, and courage and constancy. In sickness, the name of Christ will be health to our souls; and in the hour of death, his rod and his staff will comfort us: we shall lean upon him while we pass through the dark valley of the shadow of death. Where Christ truly “dwells in the heart by faith,” he will never for a long period be absent from our thoughts. Our hopes will be too much fixed upon him; our peace will be too manifestly derived from him, to permit us long to remain without meditation upon the power and grace of Him who is at once our Shepherd, our Friend, our Lord, our Life, our Light, our Glory, our Redeemer, our Intercessor, our “all in all.”

My brethren I would then ask, “What think ye of Christ?” Does he thus dwell in *your* hearts by faith? Are you, with an earnestness unfelt on other subjects, accustomed to meditate upon his mercies, and to study his word? Not to have the heart supremely fixed upon him, is not to know him aright. A right knowledge of him will discover such infinite obligations to him, will reveal in him such perfections and such glory, that we cannot but consider him as the most glorious object upon which the contemplation of man can be fixed.—Suffer me to ask; Do *you*, my friends, know him in this way? Do your thoughts dwell upon him with inexpressible delight and confidence? If not, how can you call yourselves his disciples? How can you consider yourselves as redeemed by no less a sacrifice than that of his own precious life, how can you imagine that he is interceding in your behalf in the courts of Heaven, while you refuse to give him the chief place in your hearts and affections?

The Apostle proceeds next to pray, that the disciples *being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."*

The "love of Christ" to his church—that love, of which many in the world so seldom think, and which they estimate at so low a value—that love, the Apostles while they speak of it, feel themselves at a loss for words adequately to describe. Hence St. Paul speaks of it as we speak of infinite space, the boundaries of which we cannot perceive, and the extent of which we cannot define. But even this expression, strong as it is, and vast as is the idea it conveys of the love which is the subject of it, does not satisfy the Apostle. He adds, which *"passeth,"* or *"surpasseth,"* "all knowledge." It is as though he had said: raise your ideas to the utmost elevation, extend them to the remotest bounds; still they are inadequate: the love of Christ no mind ever yet fully conceived.

But, you may ask, why should it not be conceived? What is the love which you so labour to magnify? In what particulars does it differ from the most exalted human love, or from the still more pure and generous affection of an angelic being? I answer—It differs essentially. But in order to comprehend it aright, it is necessary that we should form some adequate conception of the glory of the Son of God, as the object of adoration to all the hosts of heaven;—that we should understand, in a degree the perfections of his nature;—that we should ourselves feel somewhat of that ardent love to his Father's law, which glowed within his breast;—that we should also be actuated, in a degree, by that inexpressible hatred of all pollution and sin which he felt;—that we should entertain a just conception of man, and be sensible how low and worthless a creature, in his fallen state, he is;—that we should understand something of what it would necessarily cost to redeem the soul, and to expiate Divine Justice. We

should feel a portion, also of what Jesus felt in the garden of Gethsemane, when his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood. We should feel something of the breadth of that love which extended to the covering of such a multitude of sins: sins of such a complicated dye: sins of the memory, the will, the imagination; sins of revolt against God, of willing service to satan, of hatred of the Almighty; sins of backsliding and treachery; sins against the clearest light and knowledge. We should also enter into eternity: should survey the duration of that love, which was from everlasting to everlasting; should behold the thrones of glory, and the eternal bliss to which that love will advance the redeemed. Oh! my brethren, how well did the Apostle exclaim, it “passeth knowledge!”

And yet this love, as the Apostle tells us, is the object of the contemplation of “all saints.” They desire, at least, to understand it. The little they do know of that love inspires them with a “hope full of immortality,” and communicates a peace which “passeth all understanding.” In this love may we be “rooted and grounded!” May the knowledge of it not be a mere transient emotion; but may we be “rooted and grounded in it” so fixed and established in it, that we may derive from the knowledge of this love, as the tree from the soil in which it is rooted, a powerful influence, which will invigorate all our endeavours in the service of God, and produce in us the fruits of righteousness, to the praise of his holy name!

Finally, The effect of our knowledge of the “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of this love will be, as we here learn, that we shall be “*filled with all the fulness of God.*” The Apostle prays that our understandings may be filled with such high and extensive thoughts of the Divine perfections and glory, as to cover, and as it were overwhelm the mind; that our hearts may be altogether absorbed by the great work of salvation; by its suitableness to the state of man, and its sufficiency to satisfy all his wants; that we may

be amazed at the greatness of the Gospel; and that we may perceive it to be truly worthy of Him who is infinite in wisdom, in glory, and in power.

The time will not permit me to make more than one short reflection on what has been said. I would propose it in the form of a question: It is this: How far does the subject matter of our prayers correspond with that of the Apostle? We pray for pardon of sin; for grace to live a sober and godly life: it is well. But do we pray, also, that "Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith;" that we may be "grounded and rooted in the knowledge of his love;" that we may "comprehend, with all saints, what is the length and breadth, and depth, and height" of it?—There are many who never consider the acquiring of a knowledge of the love of Christ as a duty. But, my fellow Christians, it is indeed the first of your duties to be sensible of your obligation to a Redeemer; and methinks it should be the chief end for which we live. Pray, then, that "Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;" that your heart may be the temple and throne of your Saviour. You will soon discover and acknowledge the unspeakable benefit of his presence. It will enliven you, it will embolden you, it will comfort you, it will shield you, it will strengthen you, it will sanctify you; for the knowledge of Christ is the light, the honour, and the glory of the church. To him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us give, as is most justly due, all glory, honour, majesty, and dominion, henceforth, and for evermore. *Amen.*

SERMON VI.

STATE OF THE SAINTS ABOVE, CONTRASTED WITH THEIR FORMER CONDITION BELOW.

(FOR ALL SAINT'S DAY.)

Rev. vii. 9—17.

After this I beheld and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the Throne, and before the Lamb clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the Throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the Throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever: Amen. And one of the elders answered saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the Throne of God, and serve him day and night in his Temple;

and he that sitteth on the Throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the Throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

ON this day, consecrated to devout meditation on a future state and a heavenly inheritance—within these hallowed walls in which we feebly attempt to emulate the worship, the feelings, and the employments of the blessed spirits above;—on this festival, dedicated to the pious commemoration of the saints who have slept in Christ and are now with him in joy and felicity; let us endeavour, my Christian brethren, by the help of God, to detach our thoughts for a few happy moments from the alluring scenes below; from the tumults, the anxieties, the troubles, the vicissitudes, the fears, the follies, the vanities, the corruptions of this sinful world; and fix them in devout contemplation, on that glorious state and that blessed assembly of which so delightful a picture has been just presented to us. It is a picture rendered sacred by the recollection that it describes the felicity of those beloved friends who were once our companions and guides upon earth; who departed hence in Christian faith and hope; and to whom our souls yet cleave in all the union of the tenderest affection. It is a picture endeared to us by the humble hope that it describes the happiness which we ourselves shall one day enjoy, when our warfare has been accomplished, our labours finished, our sorrows ended, and our released spirits have “entered into the joy of our Lord.”

“I beheld” says the Apostle (admitted, for the consolation of the church to witness and record the happiness of the saints in heaven;) “I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood

before the Throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." O what a different scene, what a different world, separated only by a slight veil from that which we inhabit—is here exhibited to our view! a world into which we may enter by a single step, and in a moment of time! Here we see a busy world, eager in vain pursuits, agitated by mere trifles, contending about objects of no moment, and immersed in things which perish with the using. All is noise, and confusion, and vanity, and sorrow, and evil. But behold another world, nigh at hand, composed of different beings, governed by different principles; where all things are as substantial, as here they are vain; where all things are as momentous, as here they are frivolous; where all things are as great as here they are little; where all things are as durable, as here they are transitory; where all things are as fixed, as here they are mutable! That world has also its inhabitants—so numerous, that the population of this world is but as a petty tribe compared to them. It has its employments but they are of the noblest kind and weightiest import and compared with them the whole sum of the concerns of this life is but as a particle of dust. It has its pleasures: but they are pure and spotless, holy and divine. There perfect happiness and uninterrupted harmony, and righteousness and peace ever prevail. What a contrast to our present state!—And is this blessed scene near us? Is there but, as it were, a step between? May we be called into it in a moment? With what anxious solicitude, then, should we endeavour to realize it! And how ardently should we desire to be prepared for an admission into it!

The number of the blessed inhabitants of heaven is represented as infinite: "I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number." And if we consider the infinite power and glory of him who created them; the magnificence and even profusion displayed in the works of His hands; the end and design for which they were created—viz. to manifest His glory: we shall at once

feel that their number must be, in the fullest sense of the word, infinite. Let us reflect, that to create a million, or a million of millions of the brightest and most glorious spirits, is as easy to the Almighty, as it was to create our first parents: He has but to will and it is done. Let us consider, that he rejoices in the multitude of his works—that every part of the universe is filled with being—from the immeasurable system of worlds, to the atom whose minuteness eludes the keenest sight. Let us reflect that heaven is the perfection of his works, the grand scene of his glory, the immediate place of his residence. There he is to be known, and adored, and glorified: there he is to receive the homage so justly due to his majesty. And shall this part of his works alone be scantily peopled? Shall those realms alone, which he made for himself, be without inhabitant? Shall heaven alone be a blank in the creation? Our Lord, it is true, hath said, speaking of the race of man, that “narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that enter in thereat;” but this expression relates solely to the earth we inhabit—one world, amidst, perhaps, an innumerable multitude. It relates also, principally, to the time in which our Lord lived. Even this world, we trust, will not ultimately be barren but produce numerous and faithful witnesses to the glory of the Redeemer. He made this earth the scene of his sufferings, and we may expect it to become the scene of his triumph. Only allow the Gospel of Christ to prevail, as the Prophets lead us to hope that in the latter days it will prevail; allow the world to continue as there is ground to expect it will continue, to a period of which the infancy has scarcely yet passed; and we may well conclude, that even from this fallen world shall multitudes, as numerous as the drops of the morning dew, crowd into the realms of light, to ascribe “glory, and praise, and honour, to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever.”

In considering the multitudes, beyond the power of calculation, which will people the realms of bliss, we

must recollect, that there multitudes congregate in happiness. On the earth, where a difficulty of subjection is often experienced; where there exists a constant collision of interests; where one stands in the way of another; where jealousies and envyings, anger and revenge, pride and vanity agitate and deform the world; numbers may tend to diffuse wretchedness and to multiply evil. Hence we flee for peace and joy from the crowded haunts of men, and court the sequestered habitation and the retired vale. But in heaven, where there can be no thwarting interests, where the wants of one are never supplied at the expense of another, where every bosom glows with love, and every heart beats with desire to promote the general happiness, the addition of a fresh individual to the innumerable throng diffuses a wider joy, and heightens the universal felicity.

The multitude assembled there is described as composed of "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues."—Here, again, we must beware of forming our judgment from the feelings and views of this fallen world. There, it will be no cause of jealousy, or rivalry, or hatred, that one person received his birth on this, and another on that side of a river or sea. A man will not despise his brother on account of the different shade of his complexion: he will not seek his destruction because he spoke in another language, nor renounce communion with him because he praised the same God, with the same spirit of piety, in a house of a different form. All these petty distinctions will have either ceased to exist, or will be completely annihilated in the general spirit of love which will then animate every mind. One pursuit will occupy every heart; each will strive only to glorify God. There will either be no distinctions, or the distinctions be like the beautiful variety we see in the works of God—like flowers enriched with different colours to delight the eye, or with various perfumes to gratify the smell. Why should distinctions offend, or variety disgust? It is the dark and selfish pride of the heart which considers

itself as the only standard of right and excellence, and therefore despises or hates every deviation from itself. Let the pride be removed, and the distinction would become a pleasing variety, instead of a source of hatred.

Alas, alas! what petty differences, engendered by pride, and nursed by the worst passions of the human breast, here separate, with unchristian hatred, those who are brethren, the children of the same God, the members of the same church, taught by the same book, partakers of the same hope, redeemed by the same Saviour, influenced by the same Spirit, travelling along the same road towards the same blessed country! Oh, Religion! our best, our dearest, holiest guide! is thy sacred name to be prostituted; is thy divine aim to be perverted, to sanction discord, to justify hatred, and to consecrate bigotry? No: Religion acknowledges nothing as her own work, but union and peace. In heaven, her throne, no odious denominations will parcel out the regenerated church, no frivolous distinctions be suffered to break the unity of the members of Christ; but people of every nation, and kindred, and tribe and tongue, will unite in one worship, will be animated with one spirit, will be actuated by one principle—and that the principle of pure and universal love.

The society of that blessed place is composed of “angels” and “saints;”—of those, that is, who have never sinned against God; and those who having sinned, have been redeemed by the Cross of Christ, and have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb;”—of those who were created, and have continued; in the highest order of bright and glorious spirits; and those who once were “dead in trespasses and sins,” who walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” but who have been “quickened together with Christ and raised up together with him, and made to sit together,” with angels, and with

the Lord of angels, "in heavenly places." Yet the angels scorn not such society: they reprove not the children of men with their fall: they refuse not to receive them into their company. On the contrary, they "rejoice" when any "sinner repenteth;" they convey the departed Lazarus into Abraham's bosom: they become "ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation;" they worship with them in the same adorations: they answer in responsive chorus to their praises. What a model for the conduct and worship of the saints below!

The employment of that innumerable company is represented as that of praise "to God and to the Lamb," who redeemed them and bought them with his blood.—In other parts of the sacred writings, where the employments of heaven are described, worship and praise are represented as the chief occupation. We are not, however, to infer from this, that the exclusive employment is religious adoration; for we know that the angels, beings of a still higher order and more spiritual nature, are frequently engaged in active commissions to execute the will of God. What are the precise occupations of the "spirits of the just made perfect," we indeed know not; nor could we, perhaps, comprehend them. It is sufficient for us to rest assured that they are occupied in that work for which they are best qualified. It is sufficient for us to know that, whatever the employments are which their Creator and Redeemer assigns to them, they are such as must tend to produce the greatest happiness, and to excite new and continual praises to God; for, in every description which is given us of the heavenly world, it is the voice of incessant praise and thanksgiving we hear; it is the overflowing of thankfulness for a state of exquisite enjoyment; it is the universal burst of gratitude, extending from one boundary of heaven to the other. The voice of prayer itself is lost in the exultations of praise; the language of complaint

is unknown, the lamentations of sorrow, and the sighs of grief are never heard.

The happiness of that innumerable company is described in the most glowing colours:—"They shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more. The sun shall not light on them" (to scorch them,) "nor any heat" (molest them.) "The Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."—Here we see every source of evil, and even of inconvenience, removed, and every good bestowed by the unrestrained bounty of Heaven.—Descriptions of this kind must be figurative; but the figures are evidently intended to convey to us the highest possible conception of unqualified good, and the total absence of all evil.

The remaining part of the description both manifests the nature and the source of the happiness which they enjoy. They are "before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." The happiness which they enjoy is, then, a refined and holy happiness. It is not the happiness of a Mahometan paradise, but such as is suited to spiritual beings of the highest order and most exalted taste. It is a happiness founded upon religion and devotion, upon near and intimate access to the Lord of life and glory. And let not this happiness be judged of by those who, far from having enjoyed pleasure arising from such a source, have, on the contrary, experienced from it only pain and restraint. They know not what religion is, nor are capable of appreciating its nature and excellence. To others, it will be sufficient to state, that religion is but another word for happiness. I do not mean this merely in the sense in which, without guarding them, the words may be understood—viz. that the effect produced by religion is happiness. I use the words literally; and design to state that religion itself the act and exercise of it, is the purest and highest happiness.—It

may here be necessary to rectify the general definition of religion. Religion is not merely the worship of God, or the exercise of obedience: it is the union of the soul with God; the conformity of the will with his will; the enjoyment of communion with him; and the transformation of every faculty of the soul to his image and likeness. Religion, here, is but the faint outline of this more sublime image of its nature; the outward expression of what it ought to be, and of what it is above. Now happiness arises from a frame of mind harmonizing with the objects which surround us. When the soul, therefore, is moulded into the perfect frame of religion in its most exalted state; when every affection and every faculty are put into perfect tune, and all are in unison with the Divine Source of all good; there must be happiness, arising from such a constitution, the most pure and perfect which a creature can enjoy. It is the happiness of God himself—of God, the Source of all happiness. It is a state of mind in which that necessarily gives pleasure which gives Him pleasure; in which there is a participation of His feelings, in which the soul drinks at the Fountain-Head of all enjoyment in which the bliss of the Almighty becomes the bliss of his creatures. Thus religion and happiness are convertible terms. They are, in fact, one and the same thing; and it is not more impossible that God should be unhappy, than that his devout servants, dwelling near his throne, and “serving him day and night in his temple,” should taste of misery.

To what an exalted height of happiness and glory, my Christian brethren, is then that “innumerable company” advanced! With what a glorious society do they hold communion! In what noble employments are they engaged; of what refined enjoyments do they partake! Blessed spirits! your lot is fixed—your happiness is permanent and eternal. You will suffer pain or feel distress no more. Your minds are cleansed from every taint of sin, your breasts are the everlasting abode

of purity and joy. All around you is peace. Every thing is concerted by Almighty Wisdom and Infinite Goodness, to banish the very elements of evil, to dispel the slightest shade of misery; to pour around you in luxuriant profusion—a profusion designating the infinitely varied power of the Giver—all the richest stores of good.—How unlike this is our present state! What a different abode is this world below! Here, fear and terror, danger and violence, pain and suffering, sin and remorse, misery and grief, poverty and labour, the curse and the frown of Justice, have fixed their abode.—But, my brethren, though “these days be evil,” give not way to despair. Let me now present to you this innumerable company under a different aspect. Let me point out to you what was their former, as well as what is their present, state. Once, these were “men of like passions with yourselves; —“they have come out of great tribulation;”—they once sighed and groaned under sufferings and sorrows as deep and grievous as those by which any of you are afflicted.—Oh! what an invaluable and sure source of consolation is it, to every pious Christian suffering under the weight of worldly calamities, to direct his contemplation to this glorious host above! Standing before the Throne, and before the Lamb clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands, methinks they say to him—“We were once as you are; we were assaulted by the same temptations; we were stricken by the same arrows; we drank deep of the same bitter cup; we combated with the same enemies; we felt all the sharpness and bitterness of the Christian warfare. Often were we ready to faint; often we cried to God in an agony of grief, on the point of being swallowed up in despair. We felt all the weakness of our faith, and trembled under the infirmities of our common nature. Faint not, therefore, in your course. Behold the “cloud of witnesses” surrounding you. With one voice they bid you “lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.” “Be strong, fear not, your God

will come: he will come with a recompense, and save you."

Oh, my brethren in Christ! my flock whom I long to present to God "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," and prepared to join their innumerable company, let me conjure every weak and every afflicted brother amongst you, to contemplate these blessed inhabitants of heaven. How changed are they from what they once were!—Praises incessantly occupy those tongues which once breathed out only complaints, and told of fears and apprehensions. Not a complaint can you make which they have not made: not a temptation can you describe to which they were not exposed. All your weakness they felt: all your trials they endured. Some, like Lazarus, were afflicted with poverty: some, like Job, were plunged from the height of prosperity to the lowest depths of adversity; some, like David, were harassed by severe persecutions; some, like Lot were vexed by the unrighteousness of those around them; some, like Eli, were cursed with unrighteous children: some, like Peter, were shut up in prison; some, like Manasses, felt all the anguish of remorse; some, like the Apostles, and the noble army of martyrs, were stoned or sawn asunder:—yet, now, their sufferings have been long forgotten, or are remembered only to bless God, who "counted them worthy to suffer for his Name's sake." One moment spent in heaven effaces forever the afflictions endured upon earth. Oh! look to them, then, and indulge the delightful hope that one day "God may wipe away all tears from your eyes," and compensate all your sufferings.

For the better confirmation of your faith, let me, lastly, refer you to the means by which this wonderful change was accomplished in them: "They washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They bear in their hands the "palm," as an emblem of victory in the good fight of faith; and they are "clothed with white robes," to denote the purity of their hearts under the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit.—

The first point to which our attention is here directed is that "blood of the Lamb" in which their robes have been washed and made white." This image is designed to shew, that it was to the efficacy of the death of Christ they trusted as the atonement for their sins. Christ was to them the "hope of glory;" that is, they founded all their hope of glory upon him. Their robes were formerly defiled and stained by sin; but they were "washed, they were cleansed, they were justified, they were glorified" by Christ. He it was who gave them heaven, and who gave them the preparation for it. He is the Lord of the world above; he has the "keys of death and hell;" he "openeth and no man shutteth; and he shutteth and no man openeth." To him, trusting in his grace and mercy, they applied, as to the Saviour of mankind; and he heard their cry and was gracious and merciful unto them. He delivered them out of the "terrible pit and the mire, and set their feet upon a rock." Behold, then, my brethren, the secret source of the wonderful change wrought in them—this grand translation from earth to heaven from ruin to glory. The Son of God came down from heaven "to seek and to save those that were lost." They heard of his love; they needed his power; they approached him in faith; they received him as their Lord;—and he acknowledged them as his disciples, interceded for them, delivered them out of their distresses, and raised them to eternal glory. And, O my brethren! Is his arm shortened that it cannot save? Is his ear heavy that it cannot hear? Has he intermitted his gracious work? Are there no new trophies of his power to be suspended in the kingdom of glory? Yes! he is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." Approach him then, with true faith and fervent prayer; "fight the good fight of faith," as they did and you also shall receive the palm of victory. Seek for the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, and you shall receive the robe of righteousness granted to them.

SERMON VII.

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS—GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.

(PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.)

1 Tim. iii. 14—16.

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but, if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

IT is my intention, first, to state what I conceive to be the true meaning of this passage of Scripture; and then to endeavour to deduce from it such practical remarks as may be likely, under the blessing of God, to prove beneficial to our souls.

I. I am first, then, to *explain the passage*.—And here I must begin by observing, that it is attended with some difficulties, which have exercised the pens of the most able commentators. It is not, however, my in-

tention to enter into any critical disquisition: as I do not think the pulpit a fit place for it. A minister should study his subject in his closet, and then bring the result of his investigations before his audience. But as many of them must necessarily receive much upon his authority, let him remember that he is strictly answerable to God for the diligence, the impartiality, and the sacred reverence for truth with which he has pursued his inquiries. It has been my endeavour not to be deficient in these respects.

In order to judge of an author's sense, it is material to know his style of writing, and his general turn of mind; for, wherever the meaning of a particular passage is doubtful, it ought to be interpreted so as may best accord with the scope of his general writings. Now, in the style of St. Paul, the following peculiarities are to be noticed:—1. He appears to have generally present to his view the Jewish dispensation. He often alludes to it, compares with it the several parts of the Christian system, and illustrates the one by the other. The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is a continued parallel of this kind.—2. He is apt, on the occurrence of a particular word, or the suggestion of a particular idea, suddenly to diverge from his general subject, and to follow up, and perhaps at considerable length to elucidate, the new topic.—3. He is accustomed to give only a rapid sketch of the subject which engages him, often leaving the detail to be supplied by the reader's mind. Much that was distinct and evident to himself is implied, rather than expressed. Even the strict rules of grammar are occasionally neglected. His mind seems so warmed by the subject, as to render him indifferent to exactness in his expressions. Hence he is often sublime in his thoughts, but inaccurate in his language; clear in his ideas, but involved in his narration; rapid in his transitions, and concise in his arguments. All these remarks will I think, assist us in the elucidation of the passage before us to which I will now proceed.

“These things,” says he (namely, those relating to the government of the church) “write I unto thee, hoping to come to thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church, the pillar of the living God.” (for so, with the learned Heinsius, would I place the words,) “and ground” or depository “of the truth.”—When the idea of the church as the “house of God” arose in the mind of the Apostle, there instantly suggested itself a comparison of the Christian church with that house or tabernacle which under the Old Testament was called “the house of God,” and particularly with that house in which God might be said to dwell during the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness. Over that tabernacle was a pillar of cloud, or of fire which in a signal manner denoted the presence and residence of the Most High God, and within the tabernacle was contained the ark which was the depository of the law of God. In this pillar, denoting the residence of God, and this ark, the depository of the Law, the Jews might justly exult. And in like manner, the Apostle goes on to shew, might Christians exult in their church: for this was now become the residence of God, and the sacred receptacle of truth. There is now the “pillar of the living God.” There is now permanently deposited the truth:—the truth, which though once borne from place to place in the ark, is now become stationary in the church.—It may be right to add, that the ancient fathers of the church consider the words “pillar and ground of truth” as bearing this reference.

The idea of the visible presence of God, as denoted by the pillar and cloud, having thus taken possession of the mind of the Apostle, he continues, in his usual manner, to dwell upon it; instituting a comparison or analogy between the presence of God formerly displayed, and the presence of Christ as vouchsafed to the Christian church. In this parallel, however, from the usual rapidity of his ideas and conciseness of his man-

ner, he leaves the points of resemblance to be in part supplied by the reader. Contemplating the similarity of the type and the antitype, he observes, "and great without controversy, is the mystery of godliness," or of the Christian dispensation. "The mystery of the appearance of God in the Pillar and Cloud to the Jews, was confessedly great: but says the Apostle, the mystery of his being manifested in the flesh, is 'without doubt great' also. If, in the wilderness God was "justified," or his divine presence and his truth were vindicated, by miraculous signs; so, in the Christian church Christ was "justified," or the truth and authority of his pretensions vindicated by the miraculous operations of the Spirit. If in the wilderness, the Divine presence was beheld by "angels" who, on Sinai, attended the delivery of the Law, and who were represented as stooping over the ark, "desiring to look into" the things shadowed out by it: thus in the new dispensation, Christ was the object of wonder and adoration to angels: he was seen by a "multitude of the heavenly host," as he lay at his birth in a manger; he was "seen of angels," when he was tempted in the wilderness; he was "seen of angels," whilst in agony in the garden of Gethsemane; he was "seen of angels," while lying in the sepulchre, and when he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. In the wilderness God delivered the Law to the Jews alone: but Christ preached his Gospel to the Jew and Gentile also. In the wilderness, only one nation believed in God, and even they continually gave way to unbelief: but the Gospel of Christ was preached throughout the world, and throughout the world was his name honoured. In the wilderness, the cloud, the visible symbol of the Divine presence, often mounted up towards heaven the seat of the Most High: and, in like manner, Christ proved his intercourse with heaven by being, in the presence of many witnesses, "received up into glory."

Such is, I conceive, the general outline of the meaning of the Apostle. But there is, I am well aware, a

difference between the several manuscripts of the Greek Testament in respect to the word "*God* manifested in the flesh." The larger number of manuscripts agree with our translation but others of great weight and antiquity, have instead of "*God*," the pronoun "*who*," a word the form of which in Greek very nearly resembles the form of the Greek word "*God*." On the ground, as well of these various readings as of some other considerations, I should not choose to lay much stress upon the proof which the term "*GOD*," here used, affords of the Divinity of our blessed Saviour. God forbid that we should attempt to support truth by arguments which we deem to be not decisive! We need no such fallacious aid. The Divinity of our blessed Lord rests upon many other passages of Scripture, where no various reading or version has ever been pretended. Indeed, if even the term *GOD* be omitted in this place, the doctrine of the Divinity of Christ is implied; for as Cyril bishop of Alexandria, about 400 years after the birth of our Lord, writes, "If the Word being God, is said to have put on human nature, then it is indeed a great mystery: but if Christ be a mere man, how can he be said to have been 'manifested in the flesh'?" "What would be the 'mystery,' if the 'angels' saw him abiding with us, being man only?"

II. But I now pass on, from the explanation of the text, to state some *Practical Observations* which it naturally suggests. And may that gracious God who "spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all," mercifully vouchsafe to us his blessing, without which we shall hear this "mystery of godliness" in vain!

Consider then, in the *first* place, the important declaration; that "without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness."—The term "godliness" means the worshipping and serving God in a right and acceptable manner; and therefore, as Jesus Christ was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man came to the Father but by Him, the whole christian dispensation is here denominated "godliness" by the Apostle. "Great," then, "is the

mystery" of christianity. The word "mystery" as used in Scripture, does not denote any thing absolutely unintelligible or incomprehensible, as it often does in modern language, but something sacred which had been hid and is made known only by Divine Revelation. The mystery of Christianity, here spoken of, consists of the several particulars which are subsequently specified—particulars, indeed, which it would never have entered into the heart of man to conceive,* had not God revealed them to us by his Spirit; namely that the Son of God should become man for our salvation; that he should exhibit in the miracles he performed, many and incontestible proofs of his Divine mission; that he should be seen and adored by the heavenly hosts while in his state of humiliation—that his Gospel should be preached to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; that every creature under heaven should be invited to partake of it—that multitudes, in every nation, should lay aside their prejudices and superstitions, and should accept him as their Lord and Saviour; and that, when he should have been thus proclaimed to the world, he should be openly "received up" into the glory of "heaven." These particulars are indeed most weighty and important and they surely deserve our most serious consideration. Indisputably 'great,' then, 'is the mystery of godliness.'

Great indeed it is, in every point of view.—Consider, for instance its *object*. This is the very greatest which can employ the attention of the mind. For what is it but the everlasting salvation of our souls? The Gospel was devised by the gracious councils of God in order to raise us from our state of sin and misery, to fit us for a nobler existence, and then to translate us into the blessed mansions of glory; mansions into which the Son of God himself has entered before, as our forerunner, that we, being forever delivered from evil, may be unspeakably happy with him through an infinite succession of ages. What object can be greater than this, more worthy of the Divine nature, or more

deeply affecting our interest:—My brethren, you all feel daily the infirmity of your nature: you are admonished that you have here no abiding city: you see your friends and acquaintance fall victims to the attacks of disease and death; you know that ere long, you must yourself lie upon the bed of sickness, your present frame be dissolved, and your soul either cease to be, or exist in some new state. Of what infinite consequence, therefore, is it that this state should be happy: that you should be translated to realms of glory, and be blessed eternally in the enjoyment of the favour and presence of your God and Saviour! God has revealed to you in Christianity the means of obtaining this blessedness. I beseech you let not this Revelation be made to you in vain. Such alas! is the thoughtlessness, folly, or sin, of many, that they feel no concern about it, no solicitude about the means of securing their eternal happiness. They are unmoved by any object which does not immediately address their senses, strike their sight or manifest itself to their touch. Future blessings, however great, do not affect them; future miseries, however dreadful, do not alarm them. Against this insensibility to future things, I would earnestly warn you. When you behold the Divine Author of Creation exhibiting such a system of wonderful dispensations for your benefit and salvation, is it for you to be indifferent, to pass them by as if you had no concern in them? If ever God spoke to the feelings of man, it is in this Revelation. If ever we are interested in listening to his voice, a voice not speaking obscurely, as is often the case when we are addressed through our natural reason, but plainly and intelligibly by the declarations of his own word,—it is when this great mystery is made known to us. If it is ever sinful and ruinous to neglect the warning of God, it surely is when so great a salvation wrought out for us by the Son of God himself coming down from heaven, has been graciously presented to our acceptance. “See, then, that ye refuse not him that thus speaketh to us from heaven.”

The period my brethren is fast approaching when no knowledge but that of this "great mystery of godliness" can be interesting to us, and no possession but that of salvation of any real value. Oh! let the commemoration of the Nativity of our blessed Saviour bring to your serious recollection the train of objects connected with it; and let it be considered an event in which you are more deeply interested than in any other which has occurred in the annals of time.

Reflect next upon the *means* by which this great object of the "mystery of godliness" was accomplished. It was by means of "God" becoming "manifest in the flesh." "The Word," says St. John "was made flesh and dwelt among us;" and "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When God brought the Jews out of Egypt into the land of Canaan he might doubtless have led them after the ordinary manner, by the instrumentality of some eminent captain, such as Joshua. But it pleased Him, whose ways are unsearchable, and whose judgments are a great deep to deviate from the natural course, and become himself their leader and commander, sensibly to display his presence in the midst of them, and to dwell amongst them in a mode totally unprecedented and new as well to the Israelites as to every other people. There was seen hovering over the Tabernacle the Cloud the symbol of the presence of God himself; a mysterious and Divine emblem, filling with astonishment and gratitude the mind of every pious Israelite.—Was it merely to the Jews that such a signal exhibition of the special intercourse and protection of the Almighty was vouchsafed? Was all this celestial interference and display of glory intended only as a safeguard in conducting a tribe of men from one country to another? No: God was giving to the world a grand lesson of his own agency: he was affording an anticipation of the manner in which, by his Divine power, he should conduct, not a tribe or a nation, but a world; not from one earthly station to another, but from earth

to heaven, not in order to satisfy them with temporal bounties, but to bless them with the eternal glory of a higher and nobler existence. If God thought proper to bring the Jews to Canaan by a miraculous display of his own energy—with how much reason might we expect that the eternal salvation of the human race should not be accomplished but by as remarkable an exhibition of the Divine interference? Hence—to save man, he sent his only begotten Son. God was thus “manifested in the flesh:” he pitched his tabernacle, “and dwelt among us; and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

While we behold this mystery of godliness, with what sentiments of gratitude, my brethren, ought we to hail and welcome the illustrious Saviour sent down from heaven to accomplish our redemption! The Scripture is full of exhortations to “take heed” that we do not despise his authority—nor reject his testimony. For “to him all the Prophets give witness,” to him all Revelation points. “There is no other name under heaven given, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ.” While I contemplate the wonders of this salvation, I own that I am lost in astonishment; and scarcely could I credit the stupendous fact, did I not perceive that in every age, in every dispensation, the tenor of Divine Revelation has been uniform; that the whole volume—and not a single discovery of the Divine will, attests these amazing truths; that the whole book of revelation must be torn asunder before these can be disjoined from it; and did I not reflect, that the very approach to infinity in any act of Divine Goodness, in itself renders it more credible, by rendering it more suitable to the infinite benignity of the Divine Being. I cannot reject the Divinity of Christ without discarding at the same time, the Divine manifestation of the Shekinah in the wilderness; without dismissing, indeed, the whole Mosaic dispensation, and the whole Mosaic record. Having credited the Divine interference in bringing the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan—the ac-

count of which is attested by evidence so strong, that it is scarcely possible to conceive how it could be stronger—I became fully prepared to believe that the Divine interference was also employed in the infinitely greater work of accomplishing the salvation of men.

When, therefore, the magnitude of this mystery of godliness staggers our reason, let us reflect that the illustrious Saviour was *“justified by the Spirit.”*—His character and dignity were ascertained and vindicated by the illustrious display of miraculous powers. What miracles were not performed by Jesus! Take but a single miracle of the vast profusion; and if you admit that one, it is scarcely possible not to admit them all. Take the single fact of Christ’s resurrection, than which there probably never was an event more satisfactorily attested. Believe only this; and all the other miraculous actions recorded in his life become credible; for, allowing the Divine interference in this one instance, you must expect it to have taken place on other occasions in order to give its attestation to the character of Jesus. It cannot be supposed that the Divine power would be exerted in order to raise from the dead an impostor or an enthusiast, or even a merely good man. God Almighty never would act in so extraordinary a manner except for some great end. Such an end was the salvation of the human race by the mission of his only-begotten Son. A greater object could not be accomplished; a more noble Personage could not be the instrument; a more grand and luminous display of Divine Power could not attest the greatness of the end, or the dignity of the Agent. The end, the Agent, the testimony were in unison with each other. “Great” indeed was the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit:”

Let us, my brethren, derive from this part of the “mystery of godliness” substantial ground on which to establish our belief in Christ, and, together with it, our hope of salvation. We need—indeed we need, if

we know ourselves, or if we feel how momentous is the issue which is before us—we need strong evidence upon which we may confidently venture our souls, and build our hopes for eternity. In the hour of death we especially need it. I allow that, in the vigour of health, amidst the levity of youthful spirits, under the effects of that worldliness which immersion in business is too apt to produce, the idea of an eternal state may be so faint; the knowledge of God and particularly of his justice and holiness may be so obscure, and the realization of the solemn account to be given at the day of judgment, may be so imperfect; that even the hope arising from our own merits, however delusive and wavering, may be sufficient to support us. But things will wear a different aspect when disease has abstracted us from the surrounding scene, and left us leisure and coolness of mind to reflect. When death has knocked at our door, and warned us to be ready for his return: when the fascination of the world has subsided, and its spell is broken: when better acquaintance with ourselves, and deeper reflection upon the state of our hearts and lives, has brought low our high conceit of ourselves, when more accurate meditation upon Scripture, so full of facts and declarations which attest the holiness of God and the alarming awfulness of his justice has bowed our hearts into a holy fear of his Name, and a serious alarm about our acceptance with him: then we shall feel our need of a Redeemer: then we shall welcome the account of his salvation as glad tidings of great joy: then we shall earnestly seek for such evidence as may calm our troubled mind, and enable us to rest with tranquil hope in the moment of death: then also, will that evidence meet our wondering eyes in all the radiance of truth; and while we contemplate Christ as justified by the Spirit, we shall be enabled to say, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes hath seen thy salvation.” God grant this may be the blessed experience of every one here present.

Christ was "*seen of angels.*"—Those heavenly hosts beheld him while yet an infant with pious awe and reverent adoration. A "multitude of the heavenly host" surrounded the stable where he lay, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, and good will to men." They beheld glory accruing to God in the highest heavens, peace and tranquillity reigning upon earth, and reconciliation and good-will to men diffused by the birth of this illustrious Stranger. Yet, to them, it was matter of wonder, and praise only; to us, it is a subject of the deepest interest. Let us not, my brethren, be silent, while they adore; let us not be cold while they deeply feel; let us not disregard those things, which they "stoop down to look into." Oh, how will heaven and earth testify against the man who has neglected so great a salvation! God will testify against him; for "he spared not his own Son, but gave" this inexpressible gift to us, and proclaimed from heaven, "This is my beloved son hear ye him." Christ will testify against him; for he laboured he suffered he died for man to make him partaker of eternal salvation. The Holy Spirit will testify against him; for he wrought a profusion of miracles in order to direct the attention to Christ, and to testify of him as the great Saviour of the world. The angels will testify against him, who came to learn upon earth the riches of this Grace of God. Men will testify against him, millions of whom have received the record of Christ, and believed on him as their Saviour. And the fallen spirits will testify against him; for even they obeyed the word of Christ; and feared his authority. Let not all these witnessess appear against us, to display to us the greatness of the neglected salvation and to aggravate our condemnation in having dared to slight so high a Saviour.

Christ was also, "*preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world.*"—To us he has "been preached;" God grant that we may hear him and receive his testimony! But methinks I see, flocking from the east

and the west, from the north and the south, many who from the extreme parts of the earth only heard the distant sound of salvation; many from the remote extremity of Africa; many from the frozen realms of Greenland; many once sunk in the lowest depths of poverty and misery, now hoping and triumphing in their Saviour, and pressing with joyful haste to the courts of Heaven. Behold, also, some of “the children of the kingdom,” shut out;—those who, through fastidiousness of taste, or sceptical apathy, or worldliness and sordidness of mind, have sat continually under the preaching of the Gospel, and remained indifferent to its glad tidings! Thus shall that Scripture be fulfilled, which I never reflect upon without shuddering; “The first shall be last and the last first.” Oh, my brethren! ye who enjoy every opportunity of religious improvement; ye whose learning qualifies you to read and understand the Scriptures; whose leisure and ease, and whose whole circumstances, afford you every advantage in the pursuit of sacred knowledge;—O beware lest you perish amidst the abundance of the means of edification; lest while Christ is “preached to the Gentiles, and believed on in the world,” he be proclaimed to you in vain.

Lastly, Christ was “*received up into glory*.—Glorry, perpetual glory, was the termination of all his benevolent labours and sufferings. And into this glory he entered, in order that his disciples might have the same splendid mansions ever before them, as the end of all their toil and the crown of all their hope: “I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also.” Under the deep impression of the truths contained in this “great mystery of godliness,” how should our thoughts soar to the blessed place where our Saviour is gone before us, and our affections be “set not on things below, but on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God!”—My brethren, do you consider that, after a short time, our labours will cease, our battle will be fought, our

warfare accomplished, and that we shall enter into eternal glory? What thought can be more animating, what more consoling, amidst the troubles and trials of your pilgrimage here! Only wait on, steadfast in faith; in love and obedience: and the Saviour who came down from heaven to save you, will receive you to his own glory. Oh! let us often turn our eyes from these sickening earthly scenes of discord, and bloodshed, and wee, to those regions of glory, where the day shines in endless lustre; where violence shall no more be heard in the land, nor wasting and destruction be found within its borders: where the sun shall be no more the light by day, nor the moon give light. but “the Lord shall be an everlasting light, and God its glory.” Would to God, that this glory were more frequently the subject of our contemplation! Then we should look with a holy tranquillity upon the petty troubles and evils of this transitory scene. We should bear affliction cheerfully, knowing that we have an enduring inheritance. We should enjoy true happiness in this world, reflected through the radiance of that glorious world above.

But let us remember, that “he who hath this hope, must purify himself, even as He” who hath called us “is pure”—for into these regions of glory the unholy shall not enter. May “God therefore, sanctify you wholly and establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints!”

SERMON VIII.

ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

Matt. xxviii. 19.

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

IF the Scriptures merely spoke of the Son of God and of the Spirit of God as beings whom we ought to reverence and worship, we should surely be bound to inquire diligently and devoutly into the manner in which this reverence ought to be displayed. But when we are baptized in their names, this expressive rite and solemn memorial gives them still larger claims upon our attention. That we are admitted into the Christian covenant by a rite which bears a distinct reference to them, clearly implies the existence of some intimate relation between them and us. That we are baptized in their name, in common with that of the Father, invests them with inconceivable dignity. It cannot but arrest our regard, even at the very entrance and porch of Christianity, that the Son and the Spirit are placed on the same level with the Father. Should we not deem it strange indeed, if we were command-

ed to be baptized with an exactly similar form of expression, in the name of persons infinitely inferior to and wholly distinct from, the Father: if the form of baptism, for instance, were this:—Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Apostle Paul, and of the Power and love of God? Add to which, the persons into whose names we are baptized bear a manifest relation to the Deity as well as to ourselves: “Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” In the name of the *Father*. Why not in the name of *God*? Why should the Divine Being be here styled the Father? He is so styled, evidently with respect to the Son, who is named together with him.—But we are to be baptized also in the name of the Son. The Son of whom? Doubtless of the Father.—And in the name of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of whom? Evidently of God, of the Father, and of the Son. The sacred names, thus introduced, were names already familiar to the Jews. The Holy Spirit, though not with a distinctness which enabled the Jews to comprehend much of his essence or origin, is often introduced into the Jewish Scriptures; and every pious Jew anticipated the coming of the Messiah, whom they were accustomed to call by the title of “the Son of God.” Our Saviour, also, had more completely familiarized them with these terms, and elevated their conceptions of the Divine Persons to whom they are applied, by his frequent mention of the Son and of the Spirit. Nor is it superfluous to add, that the doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on a few passages, where, as in my text, the Father the Son or the Spirit, are mentioned as it were, collectively; but upon a multitude of passages where they are separately introduced. If, therefore this, and every passage which speaks of these Divine Persons collectively, were blotted out, still the doctrine would be triumphantly established by other passages; and is, in fact, interwoven with the very frame of Scripture.—I acknowledge, however, that

there have been few points of doctrine more warmly disputed than this. It may therefore, I apprehend be useful to endeavour to state the subject clearly so as to obviate some mis-conceptions which prevail with regard to it, and to pave the way for its more cordial reception.

The doctrine of what is called the "Trinity," concisely stated is this—that although there is only one God this God, is revealed to man as subsisting under three distinct names and Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—who are yet, in a sense to us mysterious and inscrutable, one God.—Let us more distinctly consider the several parts of the doctrine thus stated.

1. In the first place, *There is but one God.*—This truth is not only universally attested in Scripture, but is at once acquiesced in, as agreeable to all our pre-conceived notions of the Deity. The difficulty is, not in admitting the Unity of the Godhead, but in comprehending the distinction of Persons. But to whatever extent we maintain this distinction, it is obvious that it must not be so held as to be incompatible with the Unity of the Divine Nature. Those indeed, who deny the doctrine of the Trinity chiefly ground their denial upon an alleged zeal for the Unity of God and, by the name which they assume, desire evidently to be considered as the only persons who maintain this great truth. But it should be understood that those who hold the doctrine of the Trinity, do, in the strongest sense, concur with them in the maintenance of this fundamental doctrine. They do not consider their own belief in the Three Divine Persons, as interfering with the doctrine of the Divine Unity. They maintain, as a fundamental truth which is to regulate and modify their belief in a Trinity of Persons, that there is only one eternal and infinite God. And, though they pretend not to explain or comprehend the consistency of this Plurality of Persons with this Unity of Nature, they nevertheless, in the most unequivocal manner,

admit and affirm it. It is true that, on this subject, some persons may have spoken rashly and unwarrantably, in representing the Three Persons to be so absolutely distinct as to be in all respects three different beings. Such representations, however, have not the countenance of our Church. And, in all our conceptions and explanations of the doctrine, let us carefully remember, that the Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are properly One. Let us not, with the view of rendering a necessarily mysterious subject familiar, so interpret it as to violate a fundamental principle of religion. It is a mistaken, as well as dishonest policy, to endeavour to preserve one part of the temple by the sacrifice of the rest.

II. But secondly, *Though God is One yet he has revealed himself under three different characters and titles; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*—The precise nature of the distinction here implied is not described in Scripture; nor, perhaps, is it conceivable by fallen man. It has, indeed, been agreed to express this distinction by the term “Person.” And this term is perhaps, as eligible as any other, whilst it is understood not to convey any real idea of the nature of this distinction, but merely to affirm that it exists and is not confined to a distinction of mere titles or attributes. Such various titles and attributes are frequent in Scripture. The Divine Being is introduced under the title of Jehovah and Elohim. He is described by his various attributes, as the “Eternal,” “Almighty,” the “Father of Lights,” the “Lord of Hosts.” But when the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are spoken of in Scripture, it is evident that these terms imply a distinction of a very different kind from that conveyed by these titles and attributes.—In this limited sense, it is, therefore, that we must here be considered as employing the term “Person.” It does not imply that distinction of nature or being, when applied to this doctrine which is implied in the use of the term on other occasions.

But it may be asked, What then do we in fact believe as to the Divine Nature? I answer, We believe, that one and the same God is 'Three in a sense which we are able neither to express nor comprehend.—And this brings us to notice a *third* point, included in the brief statement of the doctrine of the Trinity delivered above.

III. The doctrine has been mentioned as "*mysterious*" and, *as to certain points, inscrutable to the human mind*.—It might be anticipated, that any Revelation respecting the Divine nature would if in any degree minute involve many points far beyond our comprehension. For with what are we familiar which is beyond the narrow range of our senses? We are acquainted, indeed, with some of the properties of animals, because these fall within the cognizance of sense; but when we attempt to speak even of our own mind, in what difficulties are we at once involved? Can we explain the manner in which the mind acts on the body: their union in the same person here; the distinct existence of the soul in a future state? Can we form the slightest conception of the manner in which spiritual beings exist at all,—beings, who without eyes, see; without ears, hear; without limbs, move; without material organs, communicate their ideas and feelings? Thus shut out, then, from an acquaintance even with the lower orders of spiritual existence, can we wonder if that Divine nature, to which, perhaps these orders approach no nearer than we to them, is incomprehensible to us? Such obscurity indeed, affords a presumption in favour of the truth, rather than of the falsehood, of any Revelation which respects the nature of God. It is no more probable that we should comprehend the Divine Nature, than that an animal of the very lowest order—an animal, for instance, wanting the organs of sight, and touch and hearing, and speech—should comprehend and delineate the faculties of man. Such, indeed is the obscurity in which the Divine Nature is necessarily involved, that it matters little what terms

are employed by us to describe it. Change the terms, yet the obscurity remains. They would either have no meaning affixed to them, or be understood in precisely the same sense with those employed for the same purpose before. Had the very terms adopted by us to express the doctrine of the Trinity been found in Scripture, the revelation of the doctrine itself would not have been more distinct and intelligible. Language could not have made that distinct which we have no faculties to comprehend.

Still, my brethren, though the doctrine of the Trinity is mysterious, and above our reason, *it is not contrary to our reason*. And this is a most important distinction. We do not believe or teach contradictions. We do not affirm that there are more Gods than one, or that God is One and Three in the same sense. To believe that any principle or nature is one, and at the same time three natures or principles, is contrary to reason. It cannot be required of the human mind, and is not required of the believer in the doctrine of the Trinity.

But are the *difficulties of the orthodox creed* still objected to us? I answer, there are difficulties upon every hypothesis which the objector may choose to adopt. In the attempt to avoid one class of difficulties, others are created quite as insurmountable. You may, perhaps, dismiss them from your theory, but then you transfer them to your Bibles. If, for instance, the Holy Spirit is not God, what, we may ask, is he? Clearly not an angel. Scripture ascribes to him none but Divine attributes. So decidedly is this the case, that unbelievers in the doctrine of the Trinity usually speak of him as an attribute of God. But, if a mere attribute, then what becomes of the passages describing his personality, and even distinguishing him from the Father? In like manner, if the Son is not God, who is he? How must we understand the title given to him—"the Son of God;" how the attributes of Divinity ascribed to him; how the worship offered, and accepted by him? Many,

in the hope of escaping difficulties, have even reduced our Saviour to the rank of man. But what difficulties have these men not to encounter? What violence of criticism, what forced interpretations, what perversion of doubtful passages and denial of the authenticity of plain ones, have they not been compelled to employ? If, indeed, *all* difficulty could be escaped by any particular theory, then (although perhaps its very clearness would be suspicious) it might be worthy of examination. But, hitherto, all objections to the orthodox doctrine, if they have shifted or eluded the difficulty, have never removed it. The recesses of the Divine Nature constitute a depth that we have no eye to measure, and no line to fathom: and he who rashly presumes upon his powers, sinks only from one abyss of error and confusion to another.

But, again, it may be objected, that, “admitting the doctrine of the Trinity not to be contrary to reason, it is still a mystery, and, as such, ought not to be made an article of faith.”—In answer to this objection, it may be observed, that in this doctrine, as in most other objects of faith and knowledge, there are parts which are plain, and parts which are obscure. Thus, a man, by reflection, is infallibly conscious of his own thoughts, and judges whatever he perceives in himself to proceed from one common principle, which he calls his *soul*. But what this soul is, or how it acts upon the body, he cannot conceive. The nature of the soul or of its operations, are no less mysterious than the sublimest truths of religion. Again: what idea can we form of *infinity* and *eternity*; and yet is it possible to do otherwise than believe them? Many similar instances might be produced to shew how utterly unfounded in the nature of things is that system of reasoning which would teach us, that nothing is to be received as true which we cannot understand. If we attend to the necessary operations of our own minds, we shall surely have no difficulty in admitting, that much is true which we are unable to comprehend. Bring, my brethren, what you

are required to believe of the Trinity to this test. You are required to believe, that these three terms, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are all applied in Scripture to the One Supreme God; that all the actions, offices, attributes which are ascribed to any of these names, are plainly attributed to, and do truly belong to, one and the same Divine Nature; that there are such frequent and evident assertions in Scripture of the Unity of God, and yet such plain distinctions signified by the terms Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as imply both a perfect Unity of nature, and yet a distinction in the Godhead; and this distinction, whatever it may be is not the same with that which we conceive betwixt the attributes of God—nor a mere difference of name, office, or relation—but some other distinction of which we have but a confused conception, and which we can express by no particular language. A more accurate acquaintance with spiritual beings, and especially with the nature of God, might develop the mysterious parts of this doctrine. Till then, we profess our faith in them merely as mysterious.

But even yet the peculiar difficulty involved in the doctrine of the Trinity may be objected; viz. that the same Divine Person is both God and man. Certain it is that the Scriptures assert the man Christ Jesus to be also the Son of God. He himself speaks of his existence before he “came into the world,” of “the glory which he had with the Father before the world began,” of his being in “the form of God” before he was in “the likeness of man.” It is also affirmed of him by the Apostle, that “in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” And he himself adopts such language, with regard to the Divine Presence as proves at the least, that God was present with him in a sense distinct from that in which he was present in the temple, in the prophets, or in the heavens. Hence he suffered worship to be rendered to him, which was refused both by the prophets and by his own followers. Hence, also, he said to Philip, ‘Hast thou not seen *me* Philip? He

that hath seen me hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" If the question be asked how can God and man be united? I must answer that I know not. But neither can I conceive how the soul and body constitute one man.

If the astonishing facts of the union of God and man in the same Person, of his birth and of his death, be alleged against the truth of the doctrine, I desire the objector to consider the stupendous object his birth and death were designed to accomplish. Had man remained in his original estate, and had there been no need of redemption, possibly (for I desire to speak with the deepest humility on such a subject) the Divine Being might not have revealed himself to man under these distinct characters. It is possible that the different titles and relations by which God has been pleased to express this distinction in the Godhead should be chiefly considered with reference to the great work of salvation, and as tending to that grand consummation of all things, when the Son of God "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" and when "the Son also himself shall be subject to him that did put all things under him, that God may be all in all." Our belief as to the work of redemption is this, that the only Supreme God, upon his foreknowledge of the fall of man, decreed to redeem mankind by a person chosen and qualified for this work through the fulness of the Divine Nature dwelling in him; and, in consideration of his passion and intercession, to impart such gifts, graces, and spiritual assistances as would be sufficient to render this redemption effectual to the saving of mankind. Now, with a view to this great design of saving mankind, and to the plan and method of the Divine Wisdom in the execution of it; and in order to give us as full and distinct apprehensions as we are able to receive, of the misery of our condition the difficulty of deliverance, and the unspeakable goodness of God in our restoration, and to fill us with gratitude and love: God has been pleased to reveal himself to us,

under several personal relations, such as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—the Father, the Saviour, the Comforter: by which titles and all others analogous to these, we are directed to consider some such kind of distinction and subordination of offices and relations in the Divine Nature—as the terms made use of do commonly import. Thus when God is pleased to represent his love to mankind by the highest image of nature—that of a father sacrificing an only and well-beloved son, the exact transcript of himself, we are to believe that, by the sufferings and death of Christ, God has given us greater proofs of his love than any man is capable of giving to another: but that such an action of an earthly parent suggests the nearest and most impressive conception of what our heavenly Father has done for us, though at the same time a conception infinitely short of the reality.

In conclusion, I would beg to say a few words on the disposition of mind with which this great subject should be approached and regarded.

In the first place, let us approach it with *humility* and a *deep conviction of our own ignorance*.—God has mercifully given us, as it were, some glimpses of his nature; and let us not use the light he has bestowed to question the truth of his own Revelation. It may be designed for the trial of our humility, that something mysterious should be revealed to us; in the same manner as affliction may be designed for the trial of our patience. It is not for us to say, “It cannot be thus; I cannot believe;” but rather, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.”

Again: *Avoid a spirit of presumptuous curiosity*.—Reason not upon the mysteries of religion, as upon topics within the cognizance of human faculties. “The secret things” my brethren, “belong unto the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed to us, and to our children, that we may do them.”

In the third place, Beware of *regarding this or any other doctrine of religion, as a merely speculative sub-*

ject:—All religion tends to practice.—And that doctrine which teaches us that it is the Son of God who died to save the world, and the Spirit of God who lives to sanctify it ought to exercise a large, a lasting, an habitual influence upon every feeling and resolution and affection of the mind.

Once more: Beware, under the pretence of simplifying the doctrine, of *explaining it away* and *substituting a theory* of your own.—God, my brethren, dispenses salvation in his own appointed way. And, having revealed this way, man must expect salvation in no other. Different ages have had their peculiar temptations upon the subject of the Trinity. Former periods of the Church have been chiefly remarkable for their subtile attempts to explain it: the present is, perhaps, not less characterised by attempts to subvert it. Be it your endeavour my brethren, neither to add to the revelation of God, nor to take from it.

On the whole, approach the doctrine with reverence, and embrace it with gratitude and joy. Acknowledge the Son who is thus proclaimed to you and pray for the Comforter who is thus promised. Learn your need of the salvation and the grace which they respectively communicate; and you will then also learn to value the doctrine. Receive and honour them as they require to be honoured; and they will enable you, by the sanctity of your life and the triumphs of your death, to vindicate the faith you embrace. “Baptized in the name of the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” enlist with your whole heart, under the banner of the Gospel: and God will “give you the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

SERMON IX.

HOW ABRAHAM SAW THE DAY OF CHRIST,
AND IN WHAT WAY THE TYPES IN THE
OLD TESTAMENT REFERRED TO CHRIST.

John viii. 56.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.

THESE words, would, perhaps, be more justly and, without doubt, would be more intelligibly translated thus: "Abraham earnestly desired that he might see my day; and he saw it, and was glad."

This declaration implies, that Abraham had possessed some previous knowledge of the Messiah; that this knowledge, having been in the first instance general and indeterminate, he earnestly 'desired to see' the day of Christ more clearly; that he was gratified in this desire; and that when he saw it, he exceedingly rejoiced."

That Abraham had possessed the general knowledge of the Messiah of which I speak, is probable; because the promise had been made to him, that "in him," that is in his family or some one sprung from his loins, should "all the nations of the earth be blessed." But he, probably, as yet knew little of the na-

ture of the blessing to be bestowed. This, then, was the point on which he sought to be informed. And he was permitted to understand it. He was favoured with such a view of the nature of that blessing which should come upon all the families of the earth, and of the manner in which it should be communicated: he saw so much of the glad tidings of the Gospel, as to “rejoice” on this account and be “glad.”

I. I propose, in the first place, to consider at what time, and in what sense Abraham saw the day of Christ.—The solution of this question must be sought for in that account of Abraham which is given in the Old Testament: for our Lord, in making the declaration in the text, meant to confirm his own authority. But he could not confirm it by offering merely his own unsupported assertion that Abraham had seen his day. The fact might be true; but if he gave no evidence of it, nothing would be added to the authority of Christ. He might have known this circumstance in a miraculous manner; but if other persons did not know it except by his assertion, their belief of it must have rested entirely upon his word. Our Lord himself inculcated this principle of reasoning at the very moment: “If I honour myself” he said “my honour is nothing.” We may conclude, therefore, that our Lord grounded his assertion upon something already revealed in the holy Scriptures.

The history of Abraham, I admit, gives no specific account of his having either desired to see the day of the Messiah, or having been permitted to see it. Indeed, if the Old Testament had spoken plainly on the subject, no occasion would have existed for our Saviour’s remark. But if there is something in the history of Abraham which, though not obvious at first, yet when properly considered, manifests both the desire of Abraham to see the day of the Messiah and his having been permitted to see it, and at the same time affords some peculiar indications that Jesus Christ was that Messiah; then there is a propriety in our

Lord's assertion, and the argument in favour of his own Messiahship is supported by his appeal to the testimony of Abraham.

Prophecy is of two kinds—direct and plain, or indirect and obscure. Of direct prophecies, there are comparatively few; and, for a wise reason—namely, that the event might not be forwarded by man for the purpose of accomplishing the prophecy. What is the use of prophecy? It is not designed to enable mankind to foretel future events; but that, after the events shall have taken place, they may appear to have been foreseen and foretold. An indirect or obscure prophecy is better calculated than a plain one, to answer this general end. It is more free from suspicion, and yet proves as fully the Divine foreknowledge. Accordingly, a great part of the prophecies, especially those relating to the Messiah, were obscure. The event was to be the key which should open and illustrate them.

Whoever has attended to the usual style of our Lord, must have observed, that he was accustomed to make declarations which were at the time mysterious. These were intended to excite reflection and inquiry; and, when comprehended, through subsequent meditation, or the further explanations of our Lord, or illustrated by succeeding events, they were found to contain some most important and interesting truths. The declaration respecting Abraham was probably of this kind. It was intended for the conviction, not so much of those cavilling adversaries who disputed rather than inquired; and who sought to confound him rather than to be instructed themselves; but of those humble and sincere disciples, who “pondered these things in their hearts” who were “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” and who gladly received the testimony that Christ was the Messiah. Such persons would be confirmed in their faith by finding in the history of Abraham, an illustration of some of the principal points in the life and death of our blessed Saviour.

The part of Abraham's history which affords this illustration is, as I apprehend, that which relates to his intended sacrifice of his only son Isaac. Abraham was, in the first place called to give the highest possible proof of his obedience to God which could be given; to offer, at the command of God a sacrifice, the most painful which could be required of a parent—the sacrifice of his beloved son. And this test to which his faith was put was rendered peculiarly severe by the circumstance of Isaac's being the son of promise; for it was declared, that "in Isaac should his seed be called." Here, therefore, both the obedience and the faith of Abraham displayed themselves in the most remarkable manner. His obedience induced him to make the sacrifice; his faith assured him, that when it should have been made, Isaac would again be raised to life from the dead, by the almighty power of God. Such obedience and faith God was pleased highly to reward, making the act by which they were evinced the very means both of manifesting the coming of the Messiah and of satisfying his earnest desire to know the manner in which the world through him should be "blessed;"—so true is it, that when God calls us to great and self-denying duties, however painful may be our apprehensions, he will not fail to sustain us in their faithful discharge.

In ancient times, Divine instruction was often communicated by actions, and these were symbolical of some other event or action. Thus Elisha directed "Joash, the king of Israel, to take a bow and arrows, and to shoot eastward, and to smite upon the ground. And when he smote thrice, and stayed, the man of God was wroth with him, and said, 'Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed them: whereas, now, thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.'" Of this mode of instruction we have innumerable instances in Scripture:—a: where Jeremiah by God's direction hides the linen girdle in a hole of the rock near Euphrates; where

he breaks a potter's vessel in sight of the people, where he puts on bonds and yokes; where Ezekiel carries out his household-stuff, and joins together the two sticks for Israel and Judah; and, to come nearer to the time of Abraham, where Jacob wrestled with the angel during the night. Now, it is probable, that the redemption of Jesus Christ might be pointed out after this symbolical manner, by the sacrifice of Isaac: after the same manner in which it was afterwards pointed out by the brazen serpent in the wilderness.

Supposing, then, Abraham to be subsequently instructed by Divine Revelation in the meaning of that sacrifice of Isaac which had been required of him: he would thus learn that the sacrifice which he had found so difficult, was also to be made by the Almighty Father of the world; that as Isaac was the child of promise, so the illustrious Person who descended from himself, in whom all the nations of the world should be blessed, would be still more eminently the subject of all the promises and prophecies of God; that as Isaac went to Mount Moriah to be laid upon the altar, so should the Son of God be afterwards offered on that same mountain; that as Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, so should Christ be the bearer of the cross. "So very exact too, was the parabolical representation, that the duration of the action, viz. three days, was the same as between Christ's death and resurrection, both which were designed to be represented in it; and further, that not only the final sacrifice of the Son of God was figured in the commanded one of Isaac, but the intermediate typical sacrifice in the Mosaic economy was represented by the permitted sacrifice of the ram offered up instead of Isaac."—(*Warburton.*)

II. Allowing this representation to be just, it becomes important, not merely as elucidating some remarkable words of our blessed Lord, but as affording us a key to interpret the manner in which Christ is prefigured in the Old Testament.

If it be true, that such an illustrious Person as the Son of God did indeed come down from heaven, and give his life for the redemption of the world; it might be expected that there would be some antecedent notice of his advent, and that if any revelation were made by God, it would have some reference to Jesus Christ. If there was no such anticipation of his coming, there might be reason to doubt his pretensions. Had there been no previous revelation there might have been no ground for this doubt; but, if previous revelations had been given, they might naturally be expected to point to Him who was infinitely the most august and glorious subject of prophecy.—This, then, is the sum of my observations. In all the principal revelations of God a reference was made, on every fit occasion, to the Messiah, as the grand object to which the hopes and expectations of man ought to be directed; a reference obscure indeed, but yet sufficiently clear for the purpose it was intended to answer. Thus, in the very first Divine communication made to man after the fall, an intimation was given, that the “Seed of the woman should bruise the Serpent’s head.” Instruction of the same kind was afforded by the institution of sacrifice; an institution evidently of Divine appointment;—an institution of which, though the Scriptures give no account of its origin, traces are found in the history before the Flood, and which is employed by Noah as an institution familiar to him. For “Noah,” it is said, “builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar.” Nothing could afford a more just representation of the great Atonement to be offered for sin than the appointment of sacrifice. We know that it was of the most ancient date, and that it became general through the world, and yet that the nations using it could give no rational account of the grounds of their own practice. The act of immolating an innocent animal appears to have had in itself little tendency to take away the guilt of sin, or render

the Deity propitious; yet it was resorted to for these purposes in almost every heathen land. If considered as originally appointed to typify the sacrifice of Christ, the appointment appears at once to be reasonable and judicious.

As we proceed with the sacred history, we find that the true knowledge of God being lost to the world, it pleased the Almighty to reveal himself to Abraham; who received a call to leave his idolatrous relations, and to remove to a land which God would shew him. Here was another revelation; and in this there was, first a promise that Abraham should be the means of blessing the whole earth; next a promise limited to his descendants by Isaac; then to one individual of those descendants. He was also further instructed by that typical act required of him, of which we have spoken, in what manner all the nations of the world should be blessed in his Seed.

As we advance still further in the sacred Records, we find that a new revelation was made to Moses with a publicity and splendour and a profusion of evidence before unknown to the world. Here also we may expect to find traces of the great Redeemer; but of what kind did they prove to be? They were still typical. There was an unquestionable reference in almost all the institutions of Moses to the great Author of our salvation. The blood of sacrifices was to be perpetually offered; an high priest was ordained; various rites were prescribed, with a scrupulous particularity of circumstances; and, when the great High Priest had come and offered his perfect sacrifice, all these institutions appeared to have been designed for the purpose of shewing, that he who appointed them had in his eye the grand Pattern and Archetype which should afterwards be exhibited to the world.

After this period, God manifested himself to his people by the Prophets.

This was a fuller mode of revelation. By this the will and intentions of the Most High were capable of

being declared more plainly. Accordingly the Prophets give far more distinct notice of the Messiah,—of the wonderful manner of his birth,—of the place and the time in which he should appear,—of the family from which he should descend,—of the dignity with which he should be invested,—of the miracles which he should perform,—of the contempt and persecution to which he should be subjected,—of the violent death which he should suffer,—of his resurrection from the dead on the third day, as well as of the nature of his Gospel, the success with which it should be preached, the extent and glory of his kingdom, and the everlasting blessings to be communicated by him to the world. All these things are so intelligibly predicted, that there can be no question as to their reference to Jesus Christ alone.

Thus we see that Abraham, Moses, and all the Prophets give witness to him, and prophesied of his day. Yet it must be remarked, that the reference which they made to him was to the men of their own day *obscure*. It was intended to be so. If the reason of this be asked, that question may be answered by another: Why was not the whole plan of salvation accomplished in the first age of the world? Doubtless the Divine Wisdom saw just reasons for delaying so great a blessing for four thousand years. “In the fulness of time,” that is, at the best adapted season, “God manifested his Son.” Now the same reasons which induced the delay of the event might also justify the withholding of full information concerning it. We surely are not competent to determine the degree of light proper to be communicated. The notice was sufficient to answer the intended purpose, although it consisted only in an obscure reference. The Apostle, in remarking on this very point, declares, that “the law had only a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image.” Its resemblance was like that which the shadow bears to the person, not like that which is afforded by a picture or a statue. It exhibited the great

outline, but not every feature of the body. The resemblance was strong in some points: it was not necessary that it should be exact in all.

III. What, then, was the design of the reference to the Saviour? I reply, that it was various. It respected the persons who lived *before our Lord*, those who were his *contemporaries on earth*, and those who lived *after him*.

1. In respect of the *persons living before the time of our Lord*, it seems to have had in view the following ends:—*First*, it served to produce in their minds, a general impression, that some great Person was to come into the world, who should be “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God’s people Israel.” They were led to transmit this imperfect knowledge from generation to generation; a knowledge perpetually enlarging itself: so that when the illustrious Saviour appeared, there might be a ready apprehension of his character, and a willingness to hail him as the Messiah.—*Secondly*, It was intended to improve and exercise faith; that quality so suited to the state of man, which in the sight of God is of great price, and which is the appointed means of salvation. In this sense the Gospel was preached before to Abraham, and Abraham partook of its blessings: “He believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.” By faith, every great and glorious action under the Old Testament dispensation was performed; so that the principle on which the venerable fathers of the Jewish Church acted, was substantially the same as that by which we are influenced, though the object of their faith was less clearly apprehended. It is obvious, that the same object may be more or less distinctly seen, as the object itself indeed may vary, while the principle of faith preserves both its excellency and its vigour. That the members of the Jewish Church did not understand as fully as we the nature of the Gospel salvation, is unquestionable. But they knew that a great Saviour and Deliverer; the Hope of all the ends of the earth,

the Desire of all nations should arise; and they, like Abraham, looked forward, desiring to see the day of Christ. Like Simeon, they “waited for the Lord’s salvation.” And this principle sanctified their services, as it does ours, and rendered them also “accepted in the Beloved.”—These obscure intimations concerning the Messiah disposed them, in the *third* place, to holy meditation and devout reflection. They were taught to compare one Revelation already made, with another—one part of their own Scriptures with another. “They searched what, or what manner of thing, the Spirit of God did signify, when he spake of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow.” And as this contemplation of the Divine Word was a religious exercise highly acceptable to God, it may have pleased him to bestow, on the more pious amongst them, such Divine illumination as enabled them to comprehend the types and typical actions much more fully than is generally apprehended. God may have rewarded extraordinary obedience and faith with extraordinary light, and thus extended to others the hope and consolation vouchsafed to Abraham.

2. The Divine purpose; as it respected *the Jews living when our Saviour came upon earth*, was somewhat different.—These obscure intimations were gradually discovered to correspond with the life and death of Jesus Christ; and thus indicated him to be the great Messiah of whom the Prophets had spoken. To those who believed in Christ they were a powerful confirmation of faith. This, indeed, was the grand argument which convinced the Jews even more than the miracles which he wrought; for the word of the Apostles “mightily prevailed,” when they proved from the Scriptures, that Christ had all the characters of the Messiah, and “that thus and thus it behoved him to suffer, and to die, and to rise again from the dead.”

3. *And, to us*, the ancient testimony concerning Christ answers the same valuable purpose. We now can look back upon a regular connected series of reve-

tations, originating at the creation of the world and delivered in sundry ways, by different instruments, and at various times, so that it was impossible to suppose any human concert, and yet uniting to prefigure the advent of that Saviour in whom we trust, and the principal events of his life and death. If these descriptive prophecies had been more clear, they might perhaps have been more useful to the Jews to whom they were delivered; but they would have been less convincing to us. Those prophecies, and these prefigurations of Christ, afford the most conclusive evidence to us, which are now seen to refer evidently to Christ, and which yet, previous to their fulfillment, were so obscure, that the coincidence of the event could not have been designed. To us, therefore, provided the application of the prophecy be clear, the obscurity of its terms is an advantage. We do not require information from the types and prophecies respecting the nature of the Messiah. This we sufficiently derive from the writings of the Apostles. The point of importance to us, is the intended reference to Jesus Christ. If that reference be evident, it is of very inferior moment to know in how many particular circumstances it consists.

These observations appear to me important, in suggesting the use to be made of the Old Testament. Errors and prejudices have been entertained, in consequence of not clearly apprehending the character of this portion of Revelation. Some have been staggered because there was so little mention of Jesus Christ. Others have thought, that every passage in it must be strained in order to render it applicable to him. Some pious men, from a high sense of the infinite dignity of Christ, and the importance of his salvation, have put such forced constructions on the words of the Old Testament and the types which it contains, that they have made the subject ridiculous in the eyes of the world. Others have gone into a contrary extreme, and have unreasonably curtailed that evidence which prevailed so triumphantly with the primitive church—that

evidence which our Lord himself employed, when “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded in the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”—Between these a line of distinction may be drawn. Let a just idea be formed of the several designs of the types and prophecies. Let it be fully understood, that they could not, and ought not to have been perfectly clear; that this necessary mystery was not to be unveiled, till Christ should come, and the fact explain the prophecy; then I think we shall see, that throughout the Old Testament there is just that reference to Christ which there ought to be—a reference sufficiently plain for the inferior faith which the pious believers of old time possessed—sufficiently obscure to demand study in the application of it, and yet sufficiently clear to establish the faith and hope of us to whom the Son of Man is revealed.

Whatever contributes to the due understanding of the Oracles of Truth; whatever removes or diminishes the difficulties in them; whatever tends to shew the excellence of Scripture, is practical, useful, and important, and may therefore, be the subject of a ministerial address. This consideration will justify the discussion of a topic not so immediately addressed to the conscience as the subjects which I generally wish to propose.

SERMON X.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PATRIARCHAL, JEWISH, AND CHRISTIAN DISPENSATIONS.

(PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.)

Luke x. 23, 24.

*Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see.
For I tell you that many prophets and kings have
desired to see those things which ye see, and have not
seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear,
and have not heard them.*

IT is a common but very just observation, that we are seldom duly sensible of the value of our blessings till we are deprived of them. There is in man an unhappy propensity to look at his wants rather than his mercies; to wish his state better, rather than to be thankful for what it is; and to contrast his enjoyments rather with some fancied state of felicity, than with the inferior blessings which others possess.

This remark is applicable to our case, under the Christian dispensation. How few persons bless God that they dwell in the "days of the Son of Man!" How few comfort themselves amidst the troubles and sor-

rows of life, with the reflection that they enjoy spiritual privileges and mercies of the noblest kind, and in the greatest abundance! —My brethren, do you reflect, that you live in the bright day of the glorious Gospel of the Son of God; that all the treasures of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness are displayed to you; that all the promises of the Gospel are yours? Well may I say to you, in the words of my text, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear and have not heard them.”

The way to know how much we are distinguished, is, carefully to compare our situation with that of our fellow-creatures. Let us, then, consider our circumstances as Christians, in reference to those of others (an employment very suitable to the design of this day,) and we shall perceive what reason we have to be peculiarly thankful.

But before I enter upon this comparison, I would ask, what is your idea of being truly blessed? Does your heart reply, “It is to possess good health and spirits, agreeable friends and sufficient affluence to supply all the comforts and conveniences of life?” If these be your views, there is a wide difference between us in the outset. Christ did not come into the world to bestow on his disciples blessings of this description. All these the heathen may enjoy in as large a measure as Christians; and therefore, if this be the turn of your sentiments, you, of course, cannot consider yourself as “blessed” because you live in the days of Christ. In order to form a true judgment on this point, our minds must be spiritual: we must feel the force of eternal things, and acquire a just sense of the value of the present life. We must place ourselves on some lofty point where we can command at once the view of thousands of ages; and, from that elevation must form our estimate of this world, with all its comforts and enjoyments. We must set before our contemplation the great and glorious

God, and the unspeakable benefit of doing his will and possessing his favour. We must discern the beauty and excellence of holiness; and must perceive the infinite superiority of the soul to the body. Christianity makes the lowest of its disciples philosophers in a juster sense than that in which the term was ever ascribed to the philosophers of old; that is, it teaches them duly to estimate and worthily to love real wisdom. Whoever, therefore, would pass his judgment on the value of Christianity, must have an understanding sufficiently enlightened to comprehend it, a taste sufficiently pure to admire it; and a heart sufficiently holy to love it. The sensual, the worldly, the covetous, the dissipated, the frivolous, want the necessary faculties: "The carnal mind is enmity against God." "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

But I address myself, I trust; to those in this assembly who can duly appreciate that light, and truth, and glory which the Son of God has revealed. Such persons will enter with pleasure into the comparison which I shall make of our condition in respect to religious privileges, with those, first, of the *Heathen* world; and then, of the *Patriarchal* and *Jewish* dispensations.

I. Let us survey the state of the *Heathen World*.—Place yourself, for a moment, amongst them, and consider what would then be your situation with respect to *knowledge* and *virtue*.

1. As to *knowledge*—Every thing among the heathens was obscure and uncertain. They had arrived at no certain conclusions respecting right and wrong. They were in the dark as to the nature of God. His being, indeed, they could not but confess; his power and wisdom were every where apparent;—but what was his character; whether he concerned himself with man or not; whether there were many Supreme Being or only one; were questions which to them were

covered with an impenetrable veil: and, if any one among them was led to entertain a real regard for truth, he must have been tormented with doubts, and occupied in fruitless inquiries respecting them. All was also dark with respect to the circumstances of man in the world: how he originally came into it; how evil obtained so general a prevalence there; what was the Creator's design in giving us existence;—all this was a matter of uncertain speculation. The same darkness and doubt prevailed with respect to the future. Whether man would exist at all after the death of the body; and if he did, where and in what manner; were points which no one could satisfactorily determine. Socrates himself one of the wisest and best of the heathens, although, while pleading his cause, he had ably discoursed concerning the happy state of the good in another life, yet plainly confessed the uncertainty of all human conclusions respecting futurity, in thus taking leave of his judges: "And now I am going off the stage: it is your lot to live, and mine to die; but whether of us two shall fare the better, is unknown to any but to God alone."

2. In the heathen world also, *vice* dreadfully prevailed. And what authority was there to check its prevalence? What principles strong enough to enable men to resist it? Their worship was base and degrading, offered in general to idols representing beings who were described as the patrons of corruption. Their ideas were worldly, sensual, and grovelling: they had no sentiments fitted to transport their minds beyond the present scene, or to raise them above the lusts of the flesh. And was not that an awful and melancholy state, in which ignorance and vice thus prevailed? But, alas! how many professed Christians are there among us, who do not discern the misery of such a state! How many, even of these, desire no benefit from the knowledge they possess of the truths of Revelation! How will the heathens themselves rise up to condemn them! Socrates declared that *he* would be contented to die

many times if he could but be assured that these things were true, which he wished to be so, respecting a future state. Some professing Christians, on the contrary who have the knowledge of these things distinctly revealed to them, are indifferent about it. Far from accounting it an evil to live amongst heathens where vice should abound, they would probably prefer it. They desire to be unchecked by the secret suggestions of conscience, or the remonstrances of religion; so true is that remark, which I before made, that it is necessary to be spiritually-minded in order to judge of the value of Christianity.

II. But let us turn our eyes from the state of the heathens, to the fairer view of those who were in some measure enlightened by Divine knowledge. Even here we shall see great reason to be thankful for the higher dispensation under which we live.

Here, however, it will be proper first to notice some common points of resemblance between the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, by which they were brought into close alliance with the clearer dispensation that succeeded them. They both declared the Unity of God, and the evil of idolatry: they both described the will of God to be the only rule of right: they both affirmed the corruption of human nature, and pointed to sacrifices as an atonement for sin: they both taught men to live a holy and godly life, and by faith to wait for a better, that is a heavenly country: they both instructed their followers to seek their peace and happiness only in God, and inculcated continual trust and dependance upon him: they both required man to love God, and to obey him cheerfully, uniformly, constantly: they both had frequent, though obscure, references to the Saviour who was to come, and both were under the sanction of the Almighty. Yet notwithstanding these points of agreement by which also they approximated to the clearer light of the Gospel-dispensation, many of their privileges and advantages fell exceedingly short of those which we have the happiness to enjoy.

To speak first of the *Patriarchal Dispensation*—One great instance of its inferiority was *its want of clear and sufficient authority*. Probably the laws and observances enjoined by it were first communicated by God to Adam, and transmitted by him to his children. Now it is easy to see that such a religion would become more and more obscure, imperfect, and corrupt in every succeeding generation. Many things would be forgotten, many misunderstood, many improperly added. After the death of Adam, there was no acknowledged standard of appeal, no source of knowledge but tradition. Hence we find that, after a very few ages, idolatry universally prevailed; and the true knowledge of God was nearly obliterated from the face of the earth. It does not appear that there were then any stated public ordinances. We do not hear of persons assembling in numbers to worship God. Men had no Scriptures which they could read in order to enliven their affections, to animate their zeal, or to exalt their hope. They had no priests ministering before the altars. Moreover, their views of another state, as well as of a Redeemer, were extremely dark and imperfect; for, however Enoch or Noah or Abraham might look forward to a future Deliverer, and a blessed eternity, it is certain that the generality of men in that day had a very small share of such light and knowledge. Even Abraham himself is represented as stretching forward with eager desire to “behold the day of Christ.” He was aware that an era of great illumination was approaching; and that an illustrious Saviour would descend from Heaven. He earnestly desired to “see that day;” and he was specially favoured with an anticipation of it, and “was glad.” In a word, the Patriarchal dispensation was intended to be of no long duration. It was calculated for a few families, rather than for a world. It answered, however, some important purposes: it manifested the need there was of a superior revelation and it then gave way to the œconomy introduced under Moses.

On the Mosaic Dispensation we now proceed to offer a few remarks.

The Apostle, in the Epistle to the Galatians, asks this question,—“To what, then, serveth the Law?” If, as he had been stating, the Law could not give life; if it did not disannul the great promise given to Abraham of the blessings to be communicated to the world by a future Messiah “to what serveth the Law? It was added,” he says, “because of transgression, till the seed should come, to whom the promise was made.” These words supply us with an idea of the precise nature of the Jewish covenant. It made no alteration with respect either to the mode of man’s acceptance, or the duties which were owing to God and man. It did not change either the way of salvation or the general nature of religion: but it was added as a temporary expedient, in order to maintain the knowledge of God and of his laws; in order to enhance the sense of the evil of sin; and in order to prepare the minds of men for that Redeemer who was to rise upon the world, like the sun in his strength, bringing light and life to the nations.—Under the Patriarchal dispensation, men had gradually lost the knowledge of God. They seem to have forgotten him partly through the want of those religious institutions which might have preserved the mind from wandering after the vain superstitions and idolatrous worship of the heathens. God therefore chose one nation from among the rest of mankind, to be the depository of his truth. He arrested the attention of his people by the most remarkable signs and miracles: he united them in one worship by means of peculiar rites: he captivated their senses by a religion of external pomp: and thus, while the substance of the former religion was preserved, the form and dress were varied. The Divine purpose was thus answered. If a perfect religion was not established, if clear and just views of doctrinal truth were not communicated; yet, under the external covering of ceremonies, the substance of truth was preserved. Every sound doc-

trine known before was retained and enlarged; every doctrine to be afterwards developed was obscurely shadowed out; and a multitude of restraints and peculiar ordinances were added, in order to secure the public celebration of the worship of the one true God.

Now it is obvious from this account of the imperfect nature of the Jewish dispensation, how earnestly the “kings and prophets,” who lived under it, would “desire to see the things which we see,” and to “hear the things which we hear.”—That dispensation may be considered as having been inferior to the Christian, in the following particulars.

1. It was *chiefly composed of types and shadows, of forms and ceremonies*.—Its ordinances did but “shadow forth good things to come;” but “the body was of Christ,” who was the perfection and accomplishment of the whole. We cannot wonder if we consider the ignorance and corruption of man, that the worshippers under the Law should place too high a value upon these ceremonies, and should too little regard the substance. The error arose from the very nature of the dispensation under which they were placed.

2. The Jewish dispensation abounded with *severe and burdensome impositions*.—The devout worshippers of that dispensation were subject to costly duties, to chargeable sacrifices, to painful abstinences, to troublesome purifications. If but by chance they touched an unclean thing they were obliged to submit, both to a temporary confinement and to the expense of a sacrifice. They were required to take three journeys to Jerusalem in every year; a requisition often attended with great inconvenience. In a word, they were under “a yoke” which they were “not able themselves to bear.” But the yoke is taken from our shoulders: we are no more subject to severe commands, and painful restrictions; but, like a son in his father’s house, are subject to the law of love.

3. The Mosaic dispensation is inferior to the Christian, inasmuch as the latter is *founded upon better*

promises;—better, as being of a more sublime and excellent nature, as being promises of spiritual and eternal things, such as grace, pardon, peace, and eternal life.—The Mosaic dispensation, considered as a particular covenant made with the Jews at Mount Sinai, promised no other than temporal blessings; plenty, and prosperity, and the happiness of this life. There were the benefits chiefly held up to view. I do not say, that spiritual and eternal things were not revealed; but then they were not exhibited with that fulness and clearness which characterize them in the days of the Son of man. Under the Christian æconomy all the promises are pure and spiritual. It is not a temporal Canaan; it is not external prosperity; it is not the pardon of ceremonial uncleanness, that are promised; but the kingdom of heaven, reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life. Temporal gifts indeed are held out to us, as well as to them; but, with this remarkable difference;—to them, earthly benefits were types and pledges of spiritual; to us, spiritual blessings are assurances of temporal so far, and so far only, as the Divine Wisdom shall see fit. The spiritual truths proposed before were dimly revealed, and few of the people understood them; but, for us, the veil is removed, and we “behold the glory of the Lord with open face.” The views entertained by the Jews, of the state of man in another life, were probably gross and carnal; but, to us, the Gospel has perspicuously shewn the invisible things of the other world;—it has instructed us in the nature of that heaven which is promised to the righteous; a state of spiritual joys, of pure and rational delights; a conformity of our nature to that of God himself, and an endless and uninterrupted communion with him. In this respect, the light of our days was emphatically foretold to be “as the light of seven days;” and it was declared that no man should have occasion to tell his neighbour to know the Lord for that, “all should know him from the greatest to the least.” The meanest believer of our day may possess a clearer

knowledge than kings and prophets of the former time.

4. Another remarkable circumstance, in which the superiority of our dispensation consists, is, *the larger and more abundant communication of the Holy Spirit*.—To the Jews it was granted as it were, by drops: on us it is abundantly poured forth. The plentiful effusions of the Spirit were reserved as the great blessing of the evangelical state. It was foretold that God would “pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground;” that he would “put his Spirit within men,” in the Gospel times, and cause them to “walk in his statutes, and to keep his judgments to do them.” Hence the Apostle while he styles the Law a ministration of death, characterizes the Gospel as the ministration of the Spirit. The Gospel was to make men partakers of a Divine nature, quickening them by the operation of the Spirit, and cleansing them from their sins. Oh invaluable privilege! Oh glorious distinction! What a rich consolation for the weak and unworthy children of men, that God will vouchsafe to them the help of his own Spirit to guide them in the way of peace, and to lead them to everlasting glory!

5. Further: The Christian dispensation excels the Mosaic in *the manner of its establishment*.—The Law was delivered with pomp indeed, but with an awful pomp. It was ratified by miracles, which Moses was enabled to perform: but even these had in them something terrible: they were demonstrations of justice and anger. By his judgments God desolated the land of Egypt: he overwhelmed Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; he punished the Israelites. But when Jesus came, “the Mediator of a better covenant,” a different appearance was exhibited: “God” was “manifest in the flesh,” and came to dwell among us. He displayed Divine power indeed: but it was not to punish or to affright mankind. All his actions had one character, and that was a character of beneficence. Innumera-

ble were the miracles of kindness and love, by which the Saviour manifested his good-will to man.

6. The Christian dispensation is superior to the Jewish, *in respect to the spirit of its institution*.—The spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of liberty. We are required by it to “love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength.” We also find him exhibited in it as a Being of such benignity, that those who truly believe cannot fail to love him. This principle of love being once established in the heart, we are left to manifest it in the way most natural and expedient. The positive rights ordained are very few: the yoke is easy, and the burden light. Nothing is required which we do not ourselves see to be reasonable; nothing which does not evidently conduce to our own benefit.

In a word—to use the metaphor sanctioned by the Apostle, while under the law, we were at “school under tutors and governors,” and “differed in nothing from servants.” But, now, we are brought home to our Father’s house. Now we are “one with God, and God with us;” we dwell in peace with him: we become sons of God by being disciples of Christ: we look up to him with confidence, and trust to dwell in his immediate presence forever.

And, as the Christian dispensation in so many points exceeds those which have preceded it, so it will continue without change as long as the world shall endure. God has now given to the world a Revelation adequate to its wants—a system which secures the glory of God, and the happiness and holiness of man. There may, indeed, be periods when the spirit shall be even more liberally poured out than in the first ages of Christianity. These seasons will arrive: they are devoutly prayed for by the whole church: they are confidently anticipated in the prophecies of old. The time, blessed be God, shall come when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.” But, even then, he will vouchsafe, not a new revelation, but a more glorious manifestation of the old.

Nothing need be added; for the work of the Son of God is completed; and it is the office of the Spirit only to give efficacy to that work. All that is sufficient for the conversion, the edification, and the final glory of mankind, has already been accomplished in the dispensation of the Son of God.

Behold, then, my Christian brethren, behold the hope to which God has invited you. Know your privileges and blessings. How many of the prophets of old, when the Spirit of God had inspired them to foretell of your days, searched diligently to discover of what manner of things they were instructed to speak, and who were the persons to whom such blessings should belong. What would Abraham, what would Moses, what would David, what would Isaiah not have done or suffered, to “see the days” in which you live! They beheld them only afar off, and yet the sight transported them with joy. They called upon the whole earth to “rejoice and break forth into singing,” on account of the great things which God would do for his people in the latter days. These are the “latter days.” The days of glory are those in which you live: the night is spent: the “Sun of Righteousness” has arisen in all its splendour. The full Revelation of God has been placed before your eyes. You dwell in the Church of Christ: all his ordinances are set before you. Every Sabbath are you called upon to taste of the mercy and goodness of the Lord. The seals of his covenant are offered to you; and all the treasures of his Gospel, and all the promises of his word, are daily exhibited to your view. It is surely then your part to *value* and *improve* these inestimable privileges.

It is your part to *value* them.—You ought to esteem them the chief good of your lives; a privilege incomparably superior to any other; a blessing for which, every morning and every evening, upon your bended knees, with the deepest gratitude you ought to bless God. The Gospel should be your consolation in ad-

versity—a sufficient compensation for all your losses. Of other blessings you may be deprived; but this will survive the shock of accident, and the ravages of time. But, do you value as you ought the benefits procured by Jesus Christ? Have you weighed the import of that argument of the Apostle, “He that spared not his own Son, but hath given him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?” Let your consciences faithfully say whether you have duly prized this inestimable Gift.—Let us suppose the day of judgment arrived: you are called to the bar, and hear a voice saying, “Here is one to whom much indeed has been given: for this man the Son of God died: to him the Holy Spirit was offered: the promises of God were continually sounding in his ears: all the Divine love and mercy were set before him, in order to draw him to God.” But if you should have disregarded these mercies and blessings, what will you answer? Will you reply, that your thoughts were too much engaged by the concerns of time and sense to attend to these subjects? Where, then, was your gratitude? Where was your true wisdom? What will be the force of such an apology before the angels before “the kings and prophets, who desired to see the things you see, and to hear the things you hear,” but were not allowed so great a privilege?—You are now too much occupied to attend to these things. Occupied about what? About the trifles which perish with the using!—You are now satisfied without these things. Satisfied with what? With joys which will shortly flee away forever!

I observe, lastly, that it is our first duty—I say again, our first duty—to *improve* the religious advantages we possess. We rejoice that Christ was born into the world. But for what end was he born? It was not only to make atonement for sin, but also to gather to himself a “peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Let us not “glory” in the mere name of Christians. Our business is to consider the ends for which Christ

came, to follow him in the regeneration, to appropriate to ourselves his atonement by a lively faith, and to receive his laws as our own laws, and to make his life the model of our own. If we do these things we shall be blessed indeed—blessed, not because we have been born into the world, but because we have been born in “the days of the Son of man.”

SERMON XI.

ON THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS.

1 John i. 3, 4.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

THE Communion of Saints is an article of our faith, which we are taught to profess in that short summary of it which we so often repeat, and which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed. It was probably thought more worthy of mention than other subjects, which, though not specified, are equally material on account of its importance in a practical point of view. It appears to be inserted in order to remind us that Christians should be found united to each other in the closest bonds of love.

The words of the text speak of this communion, or fellowship of souls. And they also enlarge our ideas of that communion, by teaching us to consider it, not as confined to the righteous upon earth, but as reaching to the Father

of Spirits, and to his Son Jesus Christ. Indeed, the very foundation of the communion of saints is the communion which is first established with the Head of the Church, the Author and Finisher of their faith. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." The Apostle here speaks of that which is the substance of the preaching of the Gospel; namely, the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He had seen him who was manifested to the world; he had heard him converse; he had touched him with his hands; and this Lord of life, thus made man, he had declared unto the disciples. The end of this preaching of Christ was to unite believers together in him; to make them partakers of one common joy in the Lord, and to cause them also to have fellowship with the Father and with the Son. Before there could be any real communion with each other, it was necessary that they should be united by one strong and common bond. This bond was faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith in him they were cleansed from their old sins; they were adopted into God's family, and became the sons of God. By faith they were made partakers of the influence of the Holy Ghost, and sealed with the Spirit, which is the earnest of the possession purchased by Christ. By faith they led a holy life, "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." By faith they all looked up to the same glorious hope of their calling; even the joyful "inheritance of the saints in light" in which they had a sure expectation of being blessed, when this transitory and evil life should be terminated. Thus their communion arose out of a similarity of condition, pursuits, and enjoyments. The subjects of one state, the followers of one political party, the individuals of one family, the members of one society of friends, have fellowship with each other. There is something similar in their views, manners, interests and pursuits; and hence they

have much intercourse. Even so, the members of the Church of Christ are united by sympathies of the most endearing kind.

But when we speak of the saints as all members of the same family, it is necessary that we consider that family in its whole extent. It is not confined to the small circle of Holy persons worshipping together upon earth. These comprise but a very small part. The whole who are thus united in Christ, form an assembly whose worth no tongue can describe, and whose number no man can compute. They are a vast body, composed not only of private Christians and of ministers now dwelling together upon earth, but of all those faithful disciples of Christ who have ever lived upon it. Confessors and martyrs, prophets and apostles, priests and patriarchs, saints militant below and spirits triumphant and made perfect above—all these make but one family. They are distinct branches of it; severed, for a little while, by time and space, but not separated by nature.

The family is to be considered as still more ample than this. The angels of heaven, who are subject to Christ, and employed by him as ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, may be justly considered as comprising a part of it; for they worship the same Lord, they are engaged in the same pursuits, and therefore the apostle speaks of them as branches of the same family living under the same Head.

Such is the family of God; into which Christ has introduced us, giving to all who are in him, access by "one spirit unto the Father." Over this family the Father, the Son, and the Spirit preside; each of them in their several offices holding communion with the members, and the members with them.

1. They have *communion or fellowship with God the Father.*—Truly, says the Apostle, "our fellowship is with the Father." All communion is reciprocal: God is the Father; the saints are the sons. He is the original Author and Source of all their grace and happi-

ness. He bestowed upon them the inestimable gift of a Saviour. He communicates to them grace: they, receiving that grace, return to him the tribute of praise and thanksgiving. He bestows life and spiritual faculties: they use that life and employ those faculties in glorifying his name and exalting his perfections. He imparts to them of his love: he sheds it abroad in their hearts; they love him in return and offer to him the free-will offering of a grateful heart. They hold communion with him, by their fervent prayers before the throne of Grace: and he vouchsafes the grace they request, and the mercy they need. This is their communion with the Father.

2. *They have communion with the Son.* “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ:”—this union between Christ and his members is of a very intimate nature, and is the foundation of their union with each other. They are one with each other, because they are one with him. He took upon him their nature, became bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh; “being made in all respects like unto them, sin only excepted.” He bore their sins, and the curse due to them; and he communicates to them of his Divine blessings and glory: and thus they become “the righteousness of God in him.” He holds communion with his Church, and his Church with him, by daily and stated ordinances; by means of which he conveys to them his grace. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is emphatically the communion of his body and blood. By ministers also, and by the preaching of the word there is communion between the Head of the church and his members. As he is, so are we. Because “he lives, we live also.” We share in his sufferings in his grace and in his glory. He is the vine and we are the branches.

3. *But there is a communion also with the Holy Spirit.*—It is chiefly through the medium of the Holy Spirit that the communion of the church with the Father and the Son is maintained. It is the office of the

Spirit to dwell with the saints to abide with them, and to seal them to the day of redemption. This doctrine is frequently declared in Scripture. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." "If ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" the Spirit dwelleth with the saints as in a temple: "Know ye not" says the Apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" this union of the soul with the Spirit of God is manifested and cherished, on his part, by communicating to it holy desires; by shedding upon it his sanctifying influences; and by the consequent production of heavenly light and knowledge and hope, and peace, and all spiritual consolations. On our part, it is sustained by meditation and prayer, by diligence in the use of all the appointed ordinances, by cherishing the blessed influences imparted to us and by studying to walk in all the commandments of our Lord blameless; for he has declared, "If any man love me, and keep my commandments, my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him." Thus the whole body of the faithful join together in communion with the Father of spirits: all meet at the same throne of Grace; the saints below, and the spirits made perfect above. They unite in one common feeling, and join in one song of praise; "to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb."

4. But further, there is a communion *between the saints in this world and the holy angels*.—This does not, indeed, consist in a visible intercourse; but it is not less real on that account. The Apostle, while describing the several branches of the family of God, expressly says, "We are come to an innumerable company of angels." Their intercourse with us is abundantly testified by holy writ. An angel foretold the death of John. An angel communicated to the blessed Virgin the glad tidings of a Saviour to be born. A whole choir of angels appeared to the shepherds, and sung

glory to God, on account of the Redeemer's birth. Angels announced his resurrection, and shewed the place where his body had been laid. Angels carried the soul of the holy but despised Lazarus to Abraham's bosom. An angel opened the door to Peter the Apostle, and thus delivered him out of prison. Angels were made ministers of prophecy to Daniel, and to the beloved John; and they were employed to bear the golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints. And it will be angels who shall sever the wicked from the faithful at the resurrection of the just. In short, the angels are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation." They are engaged in promoting the cause of Christ in his Church, and are interested in the welfare of his members: "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth."

5. There is also a communion *between the different saints who live on earth, as well as between them and those who have departed this life in the faith and fear of God.*—These last are still members of the same family, removed into a different part of the house of God. Death makes no change of employments or affections. It only elevates and refines them.

With respect to the saints militant here on earth, it is to be observed, that some kind of communion subsists between all the members of the external church. They are partakers of the same baptism; they make the same profession of faith; they acknowledge the same principles of religion; they hear the same word preached; they sit at the same table, and partake of the same sacred elements of bread and wine. But these things are all external: they are but signs or symbols of little importance, while the spirit and grace they signify are wanting. It is only among real Christians that there can be true communion. And this consists in several particulars, some of which I will now proceed to specify.

The Church of Christ is dispersed through the whole globe, separated by difference of language, by

disparity of rank, of age, and of circumstances. But, as if actuated by one soul, they all engage in the same *pursuits*: all make it their chief study to serve and glorify God; all daily bow their knees before God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ; all are occupied in reading and meditating on his blessed Word; all are seeking to have their evil natures sanctified, and to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ” their common Lord. These are their daily pursuits, these the works which they feel and avow to be of the first importance. Thus they continue to be occupied, till the day when their Lord calls them to join the family of the redeemed above.

Nor is this communion confined to their occupations. They share also in each other’s *joys*; “joys in which a stranger intermeddleth not.”—They mutually rejoice in Christ, in the honour paid to his name, and in the increasing knowledge of his religion. They rejoice when the light of God’s countenance is lifted up upon their souls, and their joy they love to communicate. They rejoice in the happiness and salvation of each other, no envy dividing the brethren in Christ. Their *consolations* are the same. The blessed Spirit reveals to all the same *truths*, and communicates the same *grace* to their souls.

There is, also, a communion of *sorrows* among the saints. “If one member” of the mystical body of Christ “suffers” the rest “suffer with it.”—They who are personally strangers, yet feel a brother’s interest in all who love God. They enter into their trials, for they are their own: they feel for them, while they behold them struggling with an evil nature and a sinful world. Do they see them affected with bodily pain? They have more than a stranger’s compassion for them. Do they hear of their lying upon a dying bed? With the anxious solicitude of brethren, they send up fervent prayer on their behalf, and tenderly sympathize with them, while engaged in the last struggle with the powers of darkness and the body of sin.

Strong also and exquisite is the communion of *love* between the brethren in Christ.—To what acts of compassion does not the love of Christ incite Christians? To what labours of love does it not stimulate them? What candour, what good-will, what readiness to oblige all who love their common Lord, does not the sense of his dying love produce? But, alas! how frequently do the chilling frosts of this cold and unfriendly climate check the growth of this Divine charity. The discovery of hypocrisy, the frowning aspect of the world, the lethargic state of some brethren, the declension or apostacy of others, produce disastrous changes, and separate those whom God had united. Still, however, the members of the Church of Christ, in general, enjoy an union which no ties of party, country, or even kindred, could produce; and they look forward with hope to the day when they shall love each other, even as they are now loved by their God.

They enjoy, moreover, communion with each other, by much *actual intercourse and conversation in the world*.—They who have the same pursuits, are engaged in the same design, and are interested in the same cause, cannot be contented to remain strangers to each other. They have a communion of subjects upon which they can converse; subjects important as heaven, dear as eternal life. To each other, therefore, they will often open their hearts, and will take sweet counsel together. They will relate their trials, and describe their fears and hopes, with an interest which none except themselves can feel.

They enjoy, lastly, communion with each other in *prayer*.—Their hearts are opened before the throne of Grace; their affections are kindled at the flame of the altar of God. Here, therefore, in sweet fellowship, the many thousands of Israel meet: here they offer up the same petitions; here they plead for each other in fervent supplication: and, while they unite in adoration and intercession, their affections are enlivened; so that, like the disciples at Emmaus, while holding commun-

ion with their Lord, they say, "Did not our hearts burn within us?"—or, with Peter on the Mount, "It is good for us to be here." Thus, on this holy day, are all the servants of Christ in every country, in every climate, of every denomination and sect, however separated by distance or by varying modes of worship united before the throne of Grace in offering up the same devout supplications, and the same animated praises.

Such, then, is the fellowship to which the Apostle in my text invited the disciples to whom he wrote. Such, also, is the fellowship to which we are called. Here, let us each say to our souls—"What is thy state, and with whom dost thou hold communion? Is it with men of a worldly spirit? Dost thou rejoice only in their pleasures, grieve only in their sorrows, engage only in their employments? Then, thou art of the world, even as they are of the world. But happy indeed art thou, if thou canst say, 'My delight is with the saints that are upon the earth, and with such as excel in virtue;' my communion is with the Father of spirits, and with his Son Jesus Christ my Redeemer, and with the angels above. I am also joined with the whole church of the faithful below: I am occupied in the same work, I possess the same comforts, I am warmed with the same love. I feel a brother's sympathy with the members of Christ. My soul unites itself to them when I approach the throne of Grace, and my heart burns within me while I converse with them upon the things of God."—My "brethren in Christ" such will be our feelings if we are actuated by the Spirit of God.

Numerous are the inferences suggested by this subject. I shall briefly touch on some of them.—In the first place, it suggests to us the necessity of being separate from the world, and of becoming "a holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works." The light of Divine Truth, and the holiness flowing from it, alone lead to that fellowship with God, and with each other, which has been described. "If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with each oth-

er." But "if we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth." For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness? There can be no communion where there is no similitude. Communion arises from a similarity of disposition and pursuits.

Let this subject also be employed to excite our thankful acknowledgments. What are we, that we should be admitted to fellowship with God? Oh how glorious is the "hope of our calling!" Let this hope support us amidst the trials of the world and against the loss of friends, which the devout pursuit of religion may sometimes produce. Is it not enough that we are joined in fellowship with angels and archangels, with the glorious company of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the holy church universal? Such a communion should fill us with lofty ideas and feelings: the heirs of heaven should not suffer their minds to be grovelling upon earth, or their hearts to be carried away with the love of a polluted world. "Let our light shine before men." Let us live as those who have "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

Let the subject inspire affection also towards real Christians. "Let our love be without dissimulation." Let us shew candour to the followers of the same Master. Are we not brethren, and shall we make each other offenders for a word? Shall those for whom Christ died be unwilling to exercise kindness to each other? Shall those, who are fellow heirs of the same promise, live as if they were strangers here? Oh let us, for Christ's sake, overlook our petty differences! Let the love of Christ be the central point in which we meet. Let it be employed to cement love between Christian brethren. Let us cultivate a sympathizing spirit. Let us abound in all the sympathies of love, in works of charity, in acts of pity and kindness for each other. Thus shall we shew that we really have fellowship with Christ: thus shall we approve ourselves to be his disciples.

SERMON XII.

ON COMMUNION WITH THE ANGELS

Hebrews xii. 22.

Ye are come to an innumerable company of angels.

IT appears to have been a favourite practice with St. Paul, to display to the disciples the privileges and happiness which belong to the state of a real Christian. He felt that happiness, and he enjoyed those privileges, in so great a degree himself, that he earnestly desired others to be made partakers of them. He accordingly gives, in the passage from which my text is taken, a striking view of the superiority of Christian privileges to those of the Jewish Church. “Ye” Christians, he says, “are not come unto the Mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire; nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest”—things calculated only to fill the mind with terror and dismay; “but ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven; and to God the Judge of all; and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the New

Covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel." Such is the society into which you are introduced,—such are the privileges you are called to enjoy.

Amongst the different members of this glorious assembly, into whose society and communion we are invited, we find mention made of "*an innumerable company of angels.*" This may justly lead us to consider as well their nature as the relation to them into which we are brought by the Gospel dispensation. It is not however, as a matter of curiosity, or subject of speculation, that I propose this subject to you; for it is to improvement alone that this day and this place are consecrated. Neither should we give the reins to a fanciful imagination, in considering a subject with which our acquaintance is necessarily so limited. On the contrary, we should, with due modesty and humility, adhere to the word of God, and be content with the information it supplies.

I do not therefore, attempt to investigate or display the nature of angels. Of the manner in which unembodied spirits exist, we can perhaps at present form no conception. Suffice it to say, that the Scriptures represent the good angels as bright and glorious spirits, who have kept their original state of holiness and happiness, and who delight to employ all the powers with which God has endowed them, in fulfilling his will and promoting his glory. Without entering, therefore, into any further explanation of their nature, let me, in the first instance, direct your attention to their number.

It is here said, "we are come to an *innumerable* company of angels."—We find, in the prophet Daniel, a magnificent account given of the angels standing round the throne of God. "I beheld," says he, describing his vision, "till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire;—a fiery stream issued and came forth from

him:—thousand thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.” Such is the number of the attendants of the Divine Majesty, that language fails in its power to express it. We need remark only, that their number is worthy of the majesty of him whose glory as much exceeds all created glory as his nature surpasses ours. David labours, in like manner, to give us an idea of the number of angels. “The chariots of God,” he says, “are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.” And the beloved disciple St John, when favoured with a view of heaven, endeavours in vain to express the number of angelic beings with which its spacious courts were filled. “I beheld,” he says, “and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.”

These passages of Scripture are sufficient to shew that the company of angels is innumerable. Nor indeed should we be surprised at this, when we consider the nature of heaven, the place of their habitation. Heaven is the perfection of the creation of God. It is the grand scene of existence; the court where God himself is said to hold his residence. This world can be considered only as a minute part of his works, and ourselves as creatures comparatively of a low class. The inhabitants of the world “come up and are cut down like a flower;” but the inhabitants of heaven never die. This world itself is but a transitory scene; a stage erected for a little while; but heaven endureth for ever. Surely then, considering the majesty of heaven, it might be expected that these glorious beings, whose powers and capacities, and whose duration of existence, are so infinitely superior to those of man, should also be as much superior in number to the inhabitants of this mere point in the dominions of God. And here allow me to draw an inference from this statement.—Be encouraged, you who are endeavouring to serve God in this evil world, from the consideration of

the number of the angelic beings. It is indeed painful to behold the world around you lying in a state of ignorance and wickedness; to behold so few examples of zeal for God, and ardent love to his name; of disinterested charity; of unblemished righteousness. Often, perhaps, are you tempted to cry out with Elijah, "I am left alone in the earth." Often, with painful but necessary singularity, are you obliged to dissent from the practice of the world and to say, "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord." But be not disheartened by the melancholy examples which crowd around you. If your eyes were opened, like those of the servant of Elisha, you would see that "there are more with you than against you." No: you who serve God faithfully and delight to do his will, you are not the few among his creatures. You are not singular, whatever the surrounding scene may seem to suggest. Those are singular among the works of God, who neglect and despise their Creator; who are living in rebellion against his will, and have shaken off the yoke of the Divine Government:—those, as you will discover in the day when you shall be permitted to behold God face to face;" those are the few, those are the anomalous and monstrous parts of the creation. You, who are sincere Christians, shall be numbered with "an innumerable company,"—united to those who are as countless as the sands of the sea; those holy and happy spirits who have ever loved and served their God. Let us then look up from this evil world to the "innumerable company of angels." We, if Christians indeed, are "come" to them;—a relation has commenced between them and the "saints which are in Christ Jesus." We, who were "once afar off, are brought nigh to them." We, who were separated from them are now united to them. We may consider ourselves as having come to" this "innumerable company" as our *friends*—as *ministering spirits*—as *examples*—and as *eternal associates*. Let us examine these four points in succession.

1. In the first place, then, we have come to them as *Friends*.

Originally, angels and men were as one family. They were the creatures of the same Lord, and partakers of the same nature. There existed between them a community of interests, a similarity of dispositions; and therefore these "bright morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy," when the foundations of the earth, the habitation of man, were laid. But, by sin, the bond of union was broken. Then angels became the ministers of God's vengeance against man. It was an angel who "went through the land of Egypt, and smote the first born in every house, that he died." It was an angel who brought the pestilence upon Judea for three days, and who lifted up his sword against Jerusalem to destroy it. It was an angel who went into "the camp of the Assyrians, and slew in one night one hundred and seventy-five thousand men." It was an angel who smote Herod, while seated upon his throne, and impiously permitting the honour to be paid to him which belongeth only to God. —We find angels also employed to sound the trumpets of God's vengeance, and to pour out the vials of wrath upon a guilty land. Thus angels are employed as the scourges of guilty and impenitent man. But Christians are, by virtue of their union with Christ re-united to the angels as friends. Thus Christ is described as having incorporated them into "one family." It was the "good pleasure of God, which he purposed in himself, to gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are in earth." Into what a noble family, therefore, are we, if really united to Christ, incorporated! To what a society are we united! To "Jesus, the Mediator," and to "an innumerable company of angels!" O! ye who are "poor in this world," but are "rich in faith, heirs" of the promises, look to the greatness of your inheritance, and to the dignity of your birth-right in Christ. What, though you may be poor and despised,

yet if "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ," if the angels are your friends, have you cause to complain? The angels regard no earthly distinctions: they consider only the love you bear to Christ. They measure your value, not by your interest in the fading possessions of this world; not by the pomp you display, or by the raiment you put on; but by your love to God, and by his love to you.

II. But we are not come to the angels as *friends* only: they are also "Ministering Spirits, sent to minister to the heirs of salvation."

To call the angels our friends, is a privilege and dignity which every humble person will justly esteem too great for such a sinful and corrupt being as man. But as their friendship with man springs not from our intrinsic merit but from the love they bear to the Author of our creation, and from the elevation of a nature at once commanding admiration and destitute of pride: so this love of God and this elevation of nature, dispose them to every employment by which God may be honoured, and man be blessed: therefore are they ministering servants to the heirs of salvation.—Thus, in order to intimate the perpetual intercourse between heaven and earth, a "ladder was displayed to the Patriarch Jacob, reaching from the one to the other," and the "angels of God, ascending and descending" upon it. Thus, also, when overwhelmed with fear of the power and indignation of Esau, whose approach he expected, was Jacob comforted by God with a vision of heavenly troops commissioned to protect him. "And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him: and when Jacob saw them he said, 'This is God's host; and he called the name of that place Mahanaim,'" or the two armies:—Thus we find them often appearing, and still oftener ministering, to the servants of God in the various trials and distresses to which they were exposed. It was an angel who brought to Elisha bread in the wilderness; that he might be strengthened for his journey. An angel appeared to Gideon, to strengthen

him, and to give him assurance of victory. An angel appeared unto Zechariah, when ministering before the altar to announce to him the birth of the illustrious forerunner of the Messiah. It was an angel who shewed to the Prophets Daniel and Zechariah, and to the Apostle John, the "things which should come upon the earth." An angel delivered Peter out of prison, and broke the chains with which he was bound. The angels carried the soul of Lazarus, when he died, into Abraham's bosom. An angel stood by Paul, to comfort him when about to be shipwrecked, and to declare to him that no harm should befall him or the persons with him. The angels are said to take charge of the servant of God, "lest at any time he should dash his foot against a stone." The angels also are employed as instruments in the hand of God, to defend the true Christian from Satan, and to defeat his evil machinations against the Church.

What encouraging views does this representation open to us! How, in the midst of perils or in the depths of solitudes, may we comfort ourselves with the idea of being surrounded by the heavenly host! What confidence may we place in their protection, if only we fear and serve God! Oh! when shall we duly estimate the blessings which accompany the Divine favour.

III. But I go on to consider the angels in another point of view. We may be said to have come to them as our *models* or *examples*.

"Wherein," it may be asked "can they be examples to us? When we propose a model to ourselves to imitate, we take one like ourselves, who has the same object to pursue, and the same difficulties to overcome." Now, it is true, that between the angels and ourselves there is an infinite distance: yet, in many points, such a degree of correspondence prevails, that we may justly propose them as objects of our imitation. They are, for instance, examples to us in the objects of their contemplation, in their adoration of God, in the harmony they display, in the love they feel, and in the obe-

dience they render to the Divine command. Let us briefly regard these blessed spirits in each of these points of view.

1. First, then, consider the *object of their contemplation*.—Doubtless the knowledge of beings, whose powers are so transcendant, must be various and extensive; extending, perhaps, to subjects of which we can form no conception. But it is remarkable, that they are not held up to our view as exploring the depths of science, but as searching into the counsels of Divine love. The mystery of Redemption occupies their attention. The sufferings of Christ, and the riches of his grace, they contemplate with rapture: “That now,” says the Apostle, “unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.” And again, speaking of the prophecies which had been delivered of the grace of Christ, he adds, “which things the angels desired to look into.” Thus, also are the cherubim represented in the temple as stooping over the Mercy-seat, astonished at the grace of God manifested to man and adoring the great Author of it. In this employment then, let us imitate the angels. Can we have a nobler object of contemplation than theirs? Can we exhaust that glorious subject which instructs and amazes even them? Here is a subject really sublime and profound, fit to exercise the noblest faculties of the mind—the mercy, the love, the wisdom, the power of God, displayed in the great mystery of Redemption. Let us be ashamed to feel so little interested in contemplations, in which it is the highest dignity of angels to be engaged.

2. Next, The angels may be considered as our examples, in their *adoration of God*.—Man worships God, and so also do the angels of God: and how do they worship him? Is it a faint and languid, a cold and formal adoration which they offer up when the host of heaven fall prostrate before the throne, and cry with a loud voice, “Salvation, and glory, and honour, be un-

to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever?" If then, we would learn how to adore God, let us consider their worship. In them we see perfect knowledge combined with perfect love, bending and stimulating every faculty of the soul to offer up a spiritual sacrifice worthy of the great Being to whom it is offered.

3. Again: the angels are examples also in *harmony*.—Could we look into heaven, we should see but one will, and, as it were but one soul, pervading the multitude of the heavenly host. The united song of the seraphim was, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of hosts: heaven and earth are full of his glory." On earth we meet together, it is true, in the house of God; we kneel at the same moment we rise together, we listen together to the word of God; but we agree, perhaps, only in these outward circumstances. In the ears of the Lord of hosts, our melody is often discord; for he looks at the heart, and there he beholds corrupt imaginations, earthly affections, wandering thoughts, unhallowed passions, polluting the service, and jarring with the offering of our lips. But in heaven, as voice answers to voice, so the will meets the will, affections mingle with affections, hearts unite with hearts. All is concord, all harmony; and, as if it were the offering of one instead of myriads of spirits, the worship is one unbroken sacrifice and one uninterrupted song.

4. Next, They are models also in their *love to God*. How little soever the great Ruler of the universe may be honoured and beloved upon earth, there is no want of love to him in the courts above. Those blessed spirits know not a cold and lukewarm regard to their Creator and Benefactor. *They* love him, as *we* ought, with all their heart, and soul, and strength. Such is the ardour with which their affections kindle and ascend to God, but they are compared to "flames of fire;"—"who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." They are as "flames of fire," in the ardour and promptitude of their affections.

5. Thus also they are our models in *obedience*.—Our Lord himself has in this respect proposed them as examples to us, when he teaches us to pray that God's "will may be done on earth, as it is by the angels of heaven." In what manner, then, do they perform it? I answer, constantly, readily, universally, cheerfully. They have no choice, no will of their own. They choose the will of God. They alike obey and rejoice, whether they be sent to direct the affairs of an empire, or to bring a meal to Elijah in the desert. It is not the employment, but the Governor who appoints it, to whom they bear respect.

Thus, then, my brethren, you see what noble examples you are taught to propose to yourselves. Lift your eyes above the frail children of men around you. If you take the measure of your duty from the worms of the earth, who are as corrupt, as ignorant, as sordid as yourself, your conceptions must be gross, your practice low, your ideas of holiness itself mean and base; therefore raise your thoughts to another world, and behold its blessed inhabitants. These are displayed to you as examples by God himself. They are also placed before you as your associates for ever.

IV. But this brings me to the last head; in which I am to shew, that real Christians are come to the innumerable company of angels, as to their *associates*.

Here, upon earth, the Christian is an associate with angels by faith, by hope, by communion, by anticipation. But hereafter we, if we be indeed Christians, shall be more intimately united to them. They now rejoice in our penitence, because they see another name written in heaven. They anxiously await the hour of our death, that they may see another soul enter into glory;—with them, so bright, so glorious, so excellent, has it pleased God of his infinite mercy to fix our eternal habitation. Oh, blessed society, from which all envy, and pride, and anger, and emulation, and strife, shall be for ever excluded! where there will be but one employment, one spirit, one heart, one object,—the

glory of our Father and their Father: of our God and their God!

There is one reflection with which I beg to close these observations. How awful is the thought, that every person, who now hears me, is united either to the devils or to the angels! To the eye of sense we seem to be all mingled together in one body: but, if the veil which conceals the invisible world were removed, we should discover a distinction as clear as will appear when the angels shall separate the wicked and the righteous. God and satan divide the world. Each has his angels subordinate to him. The "god of this world," emphatically and awfully so styled, on account of the number of subjects he at present possesses, "rules in the children of disobedience" by his evil spirits: while God sends his "angels to minister to them that are the heirs of salvation." And, according to the success of the good and evil angels, in moulding their respective charges to their own nature and character, the objects of their respective superintendence will rejoice with angels, or suffer with devils for ever. Thou, therefore, who openest thy mouth in blasphemy and cursing against God; thou who endeavourest to subvert the government of God, and to loosen the grasp which the obligations of his truth have upon the mind; thou who tramplest upon his laws: thou who slightest the ordinances of his grace, the worship of God, and the word of God:—is it not evident to whom thou art united? Art thou not doing the work of devils? Art thou not already associated with them? Art thou not "treasuring up for thyself wrath against the day of wrath?" Oh! let me conjure you to pause to consider, to repent! Even for you there is hope. Behold the glorious company of angels. They desire to receive you: they stretch forth their hands to you. In their holy zeal to reclaim the wicked, and to enlarge their blessed society, they carry the everlasting Gospel to all nations. Will you renounce them, to have fellowship with devils? Oh, turn to God, that you may be added to this innumerable company! And *you* who, through

Jesus Christ are thus united to and associated with angels, see that you do the work of angels. Be conformed to them in your tempers and views. Live like them here, as the best, the only, preparation for an eternal residence and communion with them hereafter. In the contemplation of this glorious prospect, who shall not adopt the exclamation of the Psalmist? "Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his host; ye ministers of his that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

SERMON XIII.

ON THE EFFECT OF SEEING GOD AS HE IS.

1 John iii. 2.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God: and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

WHOEVER entertains a proper view of the nature of this life, the miseries to which it is subject, and the corruptions with which it is defiled, will frequently be looking forward towards another state of existence with anxious curiosity and humble hope, and will often meditate upon the partial discoveries and obscure intimations which the Scriptures afford concerning the nature of that state. Partial and obscure as they are, they serve, however, to convey some important lessons of instruction to us with respect to our duty in the present life. They reflect a light by which its true character and condition are more distinctly traced; and thus render our researches into the mysteries of the future world, while made under the guidance of Revelation, a source not of useless gratification to curiosity, but of real and

practical improvement. It is in this view that the passage of Scripture contained in the text has been selected. It gives a glimpse of the eternal state, and presents a very striking idea, which it will be edifying to pursue and to develop.

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” “Beloved, *now*” in this fallen and sinful world, “*are we the sons of God.*”—God considers us as his sons, having adopted us into his family, sent his Son to become our Redeemer, and his Spirit to sanctify us, and having also given to us many great and valuable privileges denoting our adoption. “And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.” The nature of the glory which we shall hereafter possess, in consequence of so high a title, is not yet clearly revealed; but this we know, that when Christ shall be manifested in his glory, and take us to himself, “*we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*” It is this last clause, which contains the striking idea to which I have alluded. It seems to intimate, that the glory which we shall enjoy in the kingdom of Christ, will consist in a perfect resemblance to Christ; and it leads us to consider, as the means of our attaining that glory, the contemplation of our Saviour “as he is.” By this full and distinct view of the glory of our blessed Lord, we shall be transformed into the same image from glory to glory. It is also evidently implied in these words, that though in heaven we shall see God “as he is,” yet we have not that view of him in the present life. They present, therefore to the mind four distinct points of consideration.

I. That in this world we do *not* see God *as he is*.

II. That in heaven we shall see him as he is.

III. That this view of the Divine Being will have a transforming efficacy to make us resemble him. And,

IV. That the glory and happiness of heaven will consist in our being thus conformed to the image of God.

I. In this life, then, *we do not see God as he is.*—In propriety, it cannot be said that in this world we see God at all. We see his works, but we do not see Him. We behold no embodied or personal divinity. There are instances, however, in which He has been even *thus* visible to human eyes. Though we know and are assured by the clearest demonstration of reason, that God is every where and at all times present with us, it will still be found that no proofs of this kind, however strong, will produce on the mind of man, as at present constituted, the full effect of sensible appearances; and it is, perhaps, on this account, that although God has no visible form permanently appropriate to him, he has yet been pleased, on some particular occasions, in condescension to human infirmity, to make himself perceptible to the bodily senses of his creatures. Thus he revealed himself to Moses, first, as a flame of fire in the midst of a bush. Afterwards he passed by him, and manifested to him a part of his glory, as he stood in the cleft of the rock. It was, indeed, only a partial and transient view; “for no man,” said God, “can see my face,” my full glory, “and live.” A similar manifestation was afterwards made to the Israelites on Mount Sinai; not indeed in any distinct shape; but “the mountain was seen as if to burn with fire, and there were thunderings and lightnings and earthquakes.” Thus, also, were visible tokens of the Divine Presence exhibited to the prophet Elijah: “Behold, the Lord passed by; and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.” The Shekinah in the temple displayed a permanent symbol of the Deity; a luminous glory first filling the whole temple

at its dedication, so that the priests could not bear to remain in it: and afterwards continuing to occupy the space within the veil which concealed the Holy of Holies. To Isaiah God manifested himself in a vision: and he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly: and one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried; and the house was filled with smoke." Without dwelling on the manner in which God was pleased to give an actual view or impression of himself to Daniel, to St. John, and to others, it is proved by the instances already adduced, that though God is properly invisible, and always equally diffused throughout all space, he may yet sometimes concentrate the radiance of his power and glory, and give such visible indications of his immediate presence, that he may be said without impropriety to be seen. But these are rare exceptions to the ordinary course of events, and do not militate against the general truth of our first proposition, *that in this world we do not see God as he is.*

And this is true, not only of the person but of the attributes of God: even the most obvious perfections of the Deity, his power and wisdom are not so conspicuously revealed in the present state of existence as to be immediately comprehended in their full dimensions. This is partly owing to the imperfection of the human faculties. The dimness of man's intellectual vision is such, that he cannot clearly or steadily discern the Divine Attributes. Thus though "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work," it yet requires a mind gifted with more than natural powers to perceive the full glory of the Creator displayed in the moon and stars; in the magnitude of their size, in the velocity of their motions, in the har-

mony of their order. We see only the surface of nature's wonders, and can often form but the most inadequate notions of the interior and more admirable mechanism, which we are not permitted to explore. Not only, however, are our faculties inadequate to the full comprehension of the works of God, as exhibited in this world—but these are themselves of a lower order, and intended only for a temporary duration. Even the heavenly bodies, brightly as they display the glory of God, are made to continue only for a short period; for ere long these heavens themselves shall be consumed, and, “the elements shall melt with fervent heat.”

But it is important in this view to remark, that the state in which we live is a state of sin and defilement; and, therefore, every thing we behold is under a curse. The great Creator has yielded to merited degradation the world which he once pronounced to be very good. We behold inscribed on it every where the characters of imperfection; the display of justice as well as of mercy; the marks of anger as well as of goodness. Evil is suffered to blend itself with the works of Divine Benevolence, to tarnish their glory and obscure their excellence. The character, in which God appears to us, is one suited to our state as fallen sinners. Here he is a Judge, administering correction, and punishing the guilty. He has reserved for another world the full display of his benignity and love. Neither personally, therefore, nor in his moral attributes, can we be said to “see God as he is.”

II. But, secondly, *in heaven we shall see him as he is.*—This implies two things: first, that our own faculties will be sufficiently enlarged to take a proper view of his glory and perfections; and secondly, that these will be exhibited to us in a clear and comprehensive light.

1. There must be an enlargement of our minds—an expansion of our faculties—before we can fully understand the glory of God, even when it is displayed to our view. It is not sufficient that the object should be

set before us, unless, on our parts, we possess the seeing eye and the understanding heart. The ox and the horse behold the wonders of creation, but cannot recognize in them the hand of the Creator; and were we translated to heaven itself, with our present faculties and views, however we might stand astonished at the exterior splendour of that dazzling scene, we should perhaps be little able to appreciate its less obvious, but more sublime, glories. But ere that blessed period shall arrive, we shall receive faculties suitable to our new state of existence, and to the enjoyment of that happiness by which we shall be there surrounded. The grossness of corporeal senses will no longer form the medium of perception. It will probably be conveyed in a far clearer and more direct mode, somewhat corresponding to our idea of intuition; so that even the same object may then give impressions infinitely more luminous and comprehensive than we now derive from it. But to whatever elevation the several faculties of our minds may then be raised, it is in their freedom from pollution and imperfection that their most important improvement will consist. It is the corruption of our nature, which in this world prevents our more distinct apprehension of the glory of God. By sin, the understanding is darkened, the mind rendered frivolous and foolish, the attention diverted from grand and sublime objects to the most insignificant trifles, the relish for moral excellence, and the perception of the beauty of holiness, impaired. By sin, the affections are become base, earthly, sordid; a proneness is acquired to relish evil rather than good, to contemplate what is gross and carnal rather than what is pure and spiritual. We have neither the power nor the inclination to turn our view from the objects of time and sense, and fix it on the less intelligible, and to us less interesting, concerns of the eternal world. But in heaven the mind will be for ever freed from these disorders: it will be attracted at once by pure and spiritual subjects, and be led with steadfast attention, and un-

wearied pleasure to contemplate the perfection of what is holy great and excellent. Nor is it only by the elevation of our mental faculties that our knowledge of God will then be promoted but by the removal also of those external impediments which at present retard the progress of that knowledge. In this world, our investigation of spiritual subjects is perpetually interrupted by the intervention of temporal concerns; but in heaven no anxious cares about a subsistence will call back our thoughts; no distressing association of painful remembrances will distract us; no temptations of Satan, the world, or the flesh, will harass our minds, or break the chain of our meditations. All without and within will correspond, and will unite to facilitate the acquisition of that Divine knowledge, which (as we have reason to think) will be at once our chief occupation and our highest enjoyment.

2. But further, as our capacity of knowing God will in heaven be enlarged, so his works will there more clearly manifest his glorious attributes. That state of imperfection, which here, in some degree, veils, and even disguises their proper character, will then be removed. The Divine wisdom, holiness, and benevolence will be displayed on every side in all their glory and brightness. They will demand instant admiration, and gratitude, and love. They will no more need comment, or explanation, or proof, than the existence of light, when the sun shines in meridian splendour. And as in the future state, the works of God will thus more fully magnify him, so his presence will then be peculiarly manifested by such a display of visible glory, as is not at present granted to the eye of man. The city of God has "no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." "And there shall be no night there: and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light." A more expressive and glorious idea cannot be presented. Here we are illuminated by the light

of the sun; but the Lord God himself will be the Sun of that place, and his rays will fill every part with glory, as he originally did the temple, when the priests could not stand before its dazzling lustre. We shall, therefore, see and feel, that “in him we shall live, and move, and have our being.” We shall rejoice in his presence, and in his light we shall see light. But this conspicuous revelation of the presence and glory of God will particularly be displayed in *Jesus Christ*. In him the perfection and glory of the invisible God are embodied and rendered visible to man. He is his beloved Son, “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;” and so full and perfect is his identity with the Father, that, according to his own representation, he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also. The Son was the visible display of the Father’s glory even in this world. He came among us “the true light which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world.” And “the Word was made flesh;” and “we beheld,” says the Apostle, “his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” It is to him that the Apostle particularly alludes in the text: “When *he* shall appear.” This term is not used of the Father, but is employed to express the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, with ten thousand of his saints and angels, to take his people to dwell with him for ever, and to execute vengeance on those that know not God. Hence the Apostle, in his view of heaven, after saying that “the glory of God doth lighten it,” adds “and the Lamb is the light thereof.” And when Isaiah beheld the Lord of hosts sitting upon his throne of glory, we are assured by the Apostle that this was the Lord Jesus Christ, who is King of kings and Lord of lords: and when John beheld the hosts of heaven falling down before the Throne and worshipping. “Behold,” saith he, “I heard the voice of many angels round about the Throne, and the beasts, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and

thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." This then will be the illustrious proof of the immediate presence of God: these will be the glorious means by which we shall see him as he is. "No man hath seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

III. It was proposed, in the third place, to shew, that this view of the Divine Being will have a transforming efficacy to make us resemble him. "We know we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." It is scarcely necessary to observe, that there is an allusion here to the case of Moses, who, when he was favoured only with a glance of the Deity, received so much himself of the glory which he beheld, that the Israelites could not look upon him; or rather, perhaps, we may say, that this occurrence was intended as an apt type and illustration of the manner in which we shall hereafter receive glory ourselves from the contemplation of the blessed God. It is a general law throughout the creation, that every thing great and good is derived from God. All wisdom, power, and goodness are but the reflection of the same qualities in him. And therefore it is very conceivable, that in heaven, where the communication between the Creator and his creatures is more direct and express than it can be here, the Divine glory may also be attended with a transforming efficacy of a more signal and immediate kind. Of the properties of the Deity, there are some indeed which seem absolutely incommunicable to man, such as his eternal existence; but there are others, of which we shall doubtless be in some degree susceptible. What portion he may please to impart of his wisdom and power we can but very imperfectly conjecture; but that we shall derive from the view of him as he is, a considerable resemblance in all moral excellencies, there can be no question. The analogy of the

present state of existence demonstrates, that in all example, whether good or evil, there is an assimilating efficacy: and there can be no doubt, if we extend the analogy still further, if we were condemned to dwell in the regions of outer darkness with Satan and the infernal spirits, exposed to the view of perpetual malignity and deceit, we too should become malignant and deceitful. Assailed with rage and execration, our passions too would be kindled; and where we were hated, we should soon learn to hate in our turn.—But not to pursue further this awful contrast, let us suppose ourselves placed in those blessed regions, where the mercy and love of God shall surround us on every side with inexhaustible profusion. In those regions of eternal tranquillity, should not our souls possess an unruffled calm? Seeing nothing on every side but happiness, could we fail to be happy? Or could we behold the triumph of eternal love, without loving also in return? Where all were endeavouring to increase our happiness, would not our hearts surely burn with a general glow of gratitude? Where all were wise, should we not learn wisdom? Where the beauty of holiness was every where diffused, could we be otherwise than holy? Thus there will necessarily be a general tendency in heaven towards a continual increase of peace, happiness, love, wisdom, and holiness. Christ will communicate to all his servants, and they to each other, every good. Out of his fulness shall we receive even grace for grace imparted to us. And, in reference to this assimilating influence, we are told, that even our bodies shall be made to resemble the glorified body of Christ. “We look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself” or to assimilate all things to himself. Thus “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

W. It remains, in the last place, to observe, that the glory and happiness of heaven consist in being thus conformed to the Divine image.—This needs very little explanation. There is, in fact, but one kind of glory or of happiness. And in God this glory and happiness are found in an infinite degree. Just in proportion, therefore, as we attain to these excellencies, we must of necessity resemble him. The resemblance to him is the exact measure of that attainment. Let us then correct our views of heaven. Let us no longer consider it as a place of happiness of what kind we know not, or conceive of it so meanly as to compare it to the most perfect pattern of temporal enjoyment; rather let us view it as the abode of happiness, because there our resemblance to the Divine Nature will be perfected. “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Thus to contemplate heaven, is to have the nearest view of it which perhaps it is possible on earth to obtain.

By way of improvement on this interesting subject, let it be observed, that it teaches us the *necessity* of becoming pure and holy in this life, in order to obtain an entrance into the kingdom of glory above. “He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as he is pure.” It is impossible that God can admit into his kingdom the impure and unsanctified. It is indeed the very object of the Gospel to prepare us for heaven by purifying us in this state of probation. That dispensation is intended to display the impossibility of our becoming happy without being holy: to shew us the nature of God and thus to convince us that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

But the subject also illustrates the *means* of becoming holy; for holiness is communicated in this world precisely in the same way as it is above. By contemplating God “as he is” that is, according to the true description of his character given in the Gospel, we become like him. Thus the Apostle teaches us;—

“We beholding as in a glass,” or mirror, “the glory of the Lord” (that is, his glory reflected in the face of Jesus Christ). “are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” The Gospel is expressly intended to be a true and comprehensive exhibition of God, and not merely such as we view in nature; for there, though we see his power and wisdom, we do not fully learn his holiness, mercy, and love. When, therefore, we study the Bible; when we meditate most deeply on the nature and character of God as there unfolded; when we pray to God for the influence of his grace and Spirit (in which act of devotion we place ourselves as it were, in his presence, and contemplate his glory;) then we take the means the most efficacious to assist our endeavours to resemble him. Then we prepare ourselves in the best manner in our power on earth, to be transformed into his image; for, in fact, the same method will be pursued above. When we die, we shall not so much change the means of resembling God as find their efficacy increased. God grant, therefore, that as we cherish this hope, we may thus “purify ourselves, even as he is pure;” that when he shall come again, with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal kingdom, where with the Father and Holy Spirit he reigns evermore!

SERMON XIV.

UNDUE REGARD TO REPUTATION A SOURCE OF UNBELIEF.

John v. 44.

How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?

OUR blessed Lord here assigns a reason for that unbelief with respect to his Divine Mission which he found so generally prevalent, and for which, on ordinary principles, it is so difficult to account. The miracles which he performed were most numerous and striking, and of unquestionable authenticity. His doctrines were most just, sublime, and worthy of a Divine Revelation: yet the great majority of the Scribes and Pharisees did not believe in him. Now all unbelief is to be accounted for upon one of two principles; either that there is not sufficient evidence to justify belief, or that the mind is not in a fit state to receive the proper impression from that evidence. In the present instance,

the former was clearly not the case: the evidence was full and indisputable. The latter, therefore, was the true cause: the minds of the Scribes and Pharisees were not in a fit state to give due weight to the miracles performed by Christ, to pay a proper attention to the nature of the doctrines delivered by him, to appreciate their value, or to judge impartially of their origin. And the particular reason why their minds were thus indisposed is assigned by our Lord: they received "honour one of another." Their reputation amongst men was the chief object of their solicitude; and, therefore, they were eager to receive those opinions which the world held in honour, and reluctant to embrace those of which the reception was generally discreditable.—The disciples of Christ were, in general, not only of poor and mean condition, but considered as fools and dupes by the wise and opulent, and honourable of that day; and therefore, a man who was influenced by regard to character *could not* believe in him. It was morally impossible that he should. Had he seen, indeed, the faith of Jesus generally received by those whose esteem he valued, he would have believed on him also; that is, he would have sacrificed to the love of reputation in another way, and made the faith of Christ to minister to his vanity. But to embrace the cause of Christ, at a period when it was calumniated and despised, required an independence of mind and a love of truth, which are incompatible with the selfish emotions of vanity. Nay more; it required a supreme desire to please God, and a just regard to his approbation as the only true honour. Whoever sought, in the first place, the honour which cometh from God, would have necessarily become a disciple of Christ; for that principle would have induced him to judge by scriptural rules: to compare the character of Christ with that foretold of the Messiah by Moses and the Prophets; to give due weight to the nature of the miracles performed by Jesus: and, above all, to study carefully his doctrines, with a view both to their intrinsic excellence.

and to their correspondence with Scripture. He, on the other hand, whose ruling principle, like that of the Pharisees, was ambition of worldly reputation, would be open to none of those sources of conviction, and would therefore continue to disbelieve.

This subject naturally leads to the consideration of three points.

I. The nature and evil tendency of an undue regard to reputation.

II. The excellence of the principle of supreme regard to the favour of God. And,

III. The connexion between such a principle and the cordial reception of the doctrines of the Gospel.

I. *The nature and evil tendency of an undue regard to reputation.* I say an *undue* regard, because there is a *proper* regard to the opinion of our fellow-creatures which is both useful and laudable.—Samuel appealed to all Israel respecting the integrity of his life. St. Paul called the Jews to witness that he had lived in all good conscience both before God and man. But, properly speaking, it is a good character rather than reputation which a man ought to seek. The love of reputation (by which is meant the love of worldly applause) results from the gratification which that applause administers to vanity. It is therefore founded on a selfish and corrupt principle. We may value the esteem of others, especially of the good, as a test of our own character: we may value it also as an instrument of power, enabling us to do good; for a man who does not possess the esteem of his fellow-creatures can do nothing useful in society. We may seek it therefore in a moderate manner, as we seek any other of the blessings of life:—but we must not make it the end and aim of our conduct; we must not use it as a motive, or be guided by it as a rule of action; we must not value it so highly as to be elated by its possession or dejected by its unmerited loss. Our aim must be to do what is right in the sight of God, and our rule must be the word of God. If, while we steadily adhere to these,

we obtain the good-will of our fellow-creatures also, it is a cause for thankfulness;—but in the opposite event, we are to console ourselves by the remembrance that they are but fallible and sinful creatures like ourselves; that their judgment may be erroneous; and that, if it is not agreeable to that of God, their approbation can confer no real advantage, nor their censure attach any permanent disgrace. “For what is man, whose breath is in his nostrils; or wherein is he to be accounted of,” in opposition to God?

There may be an undue regard to reputation prevailing even in those cases in which the opinion of the world seems to be entirely despised. An affectation of singularity, a direct contrariety to the maxims or conduct of the world, may spring from the desire of reputation only directed in a peculiar channel. By a bold deviation from the ways of the world, and a professed contempt of its opinions, we may be aiming at the character of mental independence, and seeking in singularity that reputation which, in the ordinary modes of thinking and acting, we have not sufficient ability to attain. In general, however, it is by the dread of being singular that an undue esteem for reputation is evinced. We are anxious to follow the world: and to think and act with those around us. If I pursue such a line of conduct, or embrace such doctrines, what will people think or say of me? is the question which naturally occurs to minds influenced by this principle; and with them it is a question so weighty as to bear down all sense of duty and regard to the will of God. Now, the evil of being guided by such a principle is very great.

1. It robs God of the glory due to him as the supreme Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world, and ascribes to men that honour and glory which are due to him alone. For throughout the whole creation, in heaven as well as in earth, the holy and blessed Creator ought to be acknowledged and treated as God by every creature. But to treat him as God implies,

that we honour and worship him with a supreme regard; that we yield him an implicit obedience: that we seek his glory as our chief aim in life; that his authority is decisive with us, and his will our only law. He therefore who is guided by the love of worldly reputation as his principle, is in a state of rebellion against God. He fears, honours, loves and obeys the creature more than the Creator, and has transferred to man the affections and the allegiance due to God. Now, are we to suppose that this can be endured by the Supreme Ruler of the universe? Is he to be dethroned, that a creature such as man, may usurp his place? Can there be greater moral guilt than this? If this principle were to prevail generally, it would amount to an entire subversion of the sovereignty of God, and it would introduce into the world all the anarchy and misery which the supreme dominion of the Wisest and best of beings can alone prevent. The order and harmony of the creation would be destroyed, and its beauty defaced. Other sins are a breach of some *particular* command: they are acts of disobedience, it is true, but they do not strike at the root of all obedience: this is the sin of rebellion, the highest of crimes, against the Sovereign Power; because it impugns the very right of legislation, and refuses obedience upon principle.

2. Again: the evil of such a principle will be apparent when we consider how base and mean is its nature, as contrasted with obedience to the Divine Will. When a man obeys and serves God, he obeys and serves a Being who of all others is confessedly the wisest, the greatest, the noblest and the best:—but if he devote himself to the opinion of his fellow-man, he chooses as his master a poor dependant creature, in nature as weak, as fallible, as ignorant, and as degraded as himself: he submits to be the slave of folly, and the victim of caprice; for what rule in general is so false as that of man's opinion; what guide so uncertain as his judgment? Reformation, besides, is absolutely impossible, while this principle is pursued: for it sets up

corruption itself as the standard by which right and wrong are to be measured. Our vices, whatever they may be, are sanctioned by those whom we have chosen as the directors of our consciences, but who are at the same time the sharers in our iniquity; and we secure indulgence by making the partners in our frailties the judges of our guilt. Indeed, after all, what is it but to make our *own* opinions our standard, where we seem to be guided by those of the world? The love of reputation is but the love of self. As we seek the good opinion of mankind because it flatters our pride and vanity; so we are guided by the opinions of the world, because those opinions are in general our own: nor do we ever differ from the world, except where our interest or our caprice leads to the deviation.

It is further evident, that such a servile regard to our reputation will be highly prejudicial to others. For it will induce us to flatter them, and to palliate and conceal the defects of their character in order that *they* may be pleased with *us*. A man, therefore, who seeks only to stand fair in the opinion of the world, is of necessity a man of no principle. He must take the complexion of the company: he must say what will gain the good opinion of those with whom he converses, not what will be agreeable to truth: he must suppress what would be painful and unpleasant, however necessary or just. Honour, integrity, truth, justice, religion, must be sacrificed at the shrine of his own selfishness and vanity. This is his aim and object, and thus their good is entirely out of the question; and his own vanity must be gratified. The gratification of these feelings is his exclusive aim; and in this pursuit the glory of God, the interests of religion, and the real good of his fellow-creatures are disregarded. It is an important circumstance, upon which too much stress cannot be laid, that whatever is wrong in the view of morals and religion is also in every other respect disadvantageous. This is wisely appointed by Providence, in order to promote the great ends of the Divine

administration; and it generally is found to take place in reference to the present subject of consideration. Another remark, therefore, which may be made upon this subject is, that those who give up the honour which cometh from God, in order to gain the esteem of man, usually fail in their object. God is the best and kindest of masters, as he is the greatest; but the world is a hard master, difficult to be pleased, capricious in its taste, quick to discover defects, severe in its censures, and implacable in its displeasure. How many, besides Wolsey, have painfully regretted their injudicious preference of the world's opinion to that of God, or of their own consciences! The fickleness of the world, the bubble of popular applause, the vanity of dependence on man, are themes which, even to satiety, have been the subjects of discourse. And it should be well weighed by those who give themselves up to court the world's esteem, that while those who seek it the most ardently are often found to seek it in vain, it is frequently bestowed most liberally upon those who never seek it at all, but whose only motive of action is a conscientious desire to please God. So true is that expression of the Divine Sovereign, "Those that honour me I will honour;" that is, cause to be honoured; and "they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

II. In opposition to this false and corrupt principle, let us consider, in the second place, the nature and excellency of that principle by which we ought to be guided; namely, that of *seeking the honour which cometh from God*.

The man who is guided by this motive sets God ever before him as his Supreme Lord, whom he is bound by every obligation readily, constantly, universally, implicitly, supremely, to obey. Whether the commands of God, therefore, be easy or difficult; whether they be agreeable to the maxims and practice of the world or not; whether he shall be despised and ridiculed, hated and persecuted, or esteemed and ap-

plauded, for his obedience to them, makes no difference in his conduct. He intensely feels the value of God's approbation, and its sufficiency to compensate the loss of every earthly good. He considers too, the extreme shortness of this life, and learns therefore to attach little value to human approbation. He is besides convinced, that even in this short life the hope of God's favour and the consciousness of acting according to his will, communicate a peace infinitely exceeding that which the favour of the world can confer; and he looks forward to the period, soon approaching, when those who have lived to the world, and to themselves, shall call on the rocks and hills to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne. He reflects, that a whole eternity is before him, and that through this eternity it will be the favour of God from which alone he must derive all his happiness and every good. Finally, he considers that God is not only his Judge, who will surely bring into trial every thought of his heart, but his Sovereign too, and his constant Benefactor; and that to rebel against him is the very height of baseness and ingratitude. Every principle, therefore, of reason, of wisdom of religion, requires him, in all things, to consult his will and to seek his approbation.

Now the excellency of such a conduct is obvious and indisputable. The principle upon which it is founded is of the utmost possible *purity*: it is alloyed by no mixture of imperfection, but consisting of regard to a Being infinitely pure, is itself infinitely pure also.—It is also the *simplest* and the *noblest*: the simplest, because it has but one end in view, which it pursues with undeviating steadiness; the noblest, because that end is the glory of God.—It is a principle *fixed and permanent*. The opinions and taste of men vary in every age and in every climate; but the will of God is like himself, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;” the same as revealed to the Patriarchs; the same as manifested by his Son Jesus Christ; the same upon earth while directing the conduct of the saints, as

in heaven while influencing the sentiments of angels and archangels.—It is a principle *always productive of peace and happiness*; for it secures the blessing of a quiet conscience, can bear the test of the most rigid self-examination, and on retrospect is always so satisfactory as amply to compensate to every man the privations to which it may have exposed him. It thus infuses a calm of mind which no other principle can confer, and leads to a settled tranquillity and “peace which passeth all understanding.” And here applies the remark which has been already made, but which cannot be too often repeated on account of its importance, that what is right is always the most advantageous. The fear of God may expose a man for a time to suffering; but it will carry him through that suffering, and will ultimately produce infinitely more satisfaction and happiness than sinful compliance could have done. If he have God and his own conscience on his side, what need has he to fear? He has that which will support him equally in a palace and in a dungeon: he has that which will render him intrepid amidst the wreck of worlds, and even in the awful entrance into eternity.

III. Such being the general character of this excellent principle, let us, in the last place, observe *how admirably adapted it is to dispose us to a ready reception of the doctrines of Christ*; and, on the other hand, how opposite is the effect of an undue regard to the opinions of men.—We well know how much the understanding is biassed by the state of the affections. It is evident, therefore, that where the love of reputation operates in the heart, the mind is predisposed to receive that doctrine, and to believe that system, which is the fairest in human estimation. But even if the error of that system is suspected, there will be no integrity of mind sufficient to secure its full investigation; no sense of the importance of truth sufficient to teach perseverance in that investigation till the truth is discovered: no fortitude of mind

to bear the contempt and reproach which may follow an open confession of that truth. In fact, the man who follows the world, and seeks human esteem alone, has nothing to do with principle, or with investigation, or with truth. He has no claim to independent reflection. He is the slave of those whose opinion he courts, and must not venture to think or believe but as they bid him. It is not to a character like this, that it belongs to pursue the calm investigation of truth, even in its secret recesses; to avow it when it is in disgrace; to bear contempt and ridicule for it; to suffer for it with a martyr's constancy. No: this requires a sterling nobleness, a magnanimous independence of thought, a high superiority to all selfish considerations; and it is only by the influence of some great principle operating on the mind that such magnanimity can be imparted. Such a principle is a supreme desire of the favour of God. Where that dwells in the soul, it immediately elevates it to the contemplation of noble and divine objects; communicates to it a cast of thinking by which it at once discovers the dignity and glory of Divine Truth, however despised, or degraded, or obscured; and is at once determined to pursue it as not less congenial to its own feelings, than agreeable to the will of God. Hence a pious Nicodemus, a devout Joseph of Arimathea, a guileless Nathanael, a just Zaccheus, an upright Centurion, were already disposed, by the fear of God, to embrace the religion of Christ; and, having received the truth, to suffer for it: while on the other hand, the Pharisees, whose religion was only a disguised species of vanity, and whose hearts were alive only to human applause and worldly reputation, were the grand enemies of Christ: of Him, who neither in his person nor his doctrines professed any thing which would gratify vanity, or minister to pride,—but who, on the contrary, bid his disciples take up their cross, deny themselves, and follow him who had not where to lay his head; who had no wealth or honour of this world, and taught his disciples to renounce the

love of these things; who commanded them to be humble, to take the lowest place, and to set their affections on things above. The contrariety of such declarations to the spirit and temper of the Pharisees, is too obvious to need illustration. The Christian principle was as opposite to that of the Pharisees, as light to darkness, or heaven to hell.

Now there is the same evil at this day in the love of human estimation; the same power in it to indispose us for discovering and relishing the true religion. Would you therefore be the disciples of Christ, your first principle must be to value above every thing the favour of God. Pray to that God from whom every thing good and perfect proceedeth, that he would fill your mind with the deepest conviction of the infinite value of his favour, that you may act every day and in all things in such a manner as you think will please him. This must be your first principle; and then learn to give less weight to the opinions of men; dare to set light by their ridicule and censure, and value less their applause. Ask yourself whether the world in general fear God and act according to his will; if they do not, they are no safe guides to follow. Take the Bible into your hand, and let Christ become your guide. If there is any thing commanded by him that is contrary to the spirit and maxims of the world, be not ashamed to practise it; and, in a humble but manly spirit, avow your determination to conform yourself in every thing to his will. With such a principle you will not fail to perceive the excellency of all that Christ has proposed for your belief, and commanded for your practice. It will approve itself to you as being congenial to your views and disposition. Such a disposition will serve to correct many mistakes into which you might otherwise fall, and to discover to you many excellencies in the truths of Christianity which you would otherwise overlook. But this disposition is the gift of God. Pray for it, and it will not be denied to you; and whilst you pray, act. Be faithful and upright in

doing every thing which you believe you ought to do; and in giving up whatever you are required to resign for the sake of God. Then you will see the force and the truth of the words of the text, and the impossibility that those should believe aright who seek honour one of another, and not the honour which cometh from God only.

SERMON XV.

ON THE CAUSES OF UNTHANKFULNESS.

Rom. i. 21.

Neither were thankful.

THE heathen world is condemned by the Apostle, not for the want of knowledge which they could not possess,—for no man will be condemned for wanting that which he had not the opportunity of attaining,—but for not acting up to the knowledge which they either did possess or might have possessed; in other words, for their criminal negligence and inattention. They in a measure, he says, “knew God.” From beholding his works they might easily infer him to be a gracious and compassionate Being. For “the invisible things of him,” that is, his attributes, “are clearly seen in the creation of the world;”—for this the words evidently mean;—“being understood” (or manifested) “by the things that are made” (by the whole frame and order of the world), “even his eternal power and godhead.” They were, therefore, inexcusable when, knowing him to be a Being of eternal power, glory, and goodness, they did not glorify him as such

a Being ought to be glorified; they did not offer him a worship corresponding to these glorious attributes. “neither were thankful;”—they did not, as they ought, feel grateful for his goodness, nor render to him the homage of obedience for the innumerable benefits which they had received at his hands. And, in consequence of their thus criminally neglecting to act up to the light they possessed, God “gave them up” to the folly of their own minds. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” in their religion, and profligate in their conduct; till, at length, they were abandoned by God and given over to condemnation. Of such importance is it, my brethren, to be faithful to the light imparted to us, and thankful for the blessings we have received from God.

Now the blessings which those heathen nations had received were only those which God has given to all mankind;—the blessings of light, of heat, of fruitful seasons, of health, of the faculties and senses of the mind and body. They understood, comparatively, very little of the real goodness of God. His mercy in the redemption of mankind, the Gospel of his Son, the influence of his Spirit, were not made known to them. Still, however, they were highly culpable in their want of thankfulness. They knew enough of the goodness of God to demand gratitude at their hands, and therefore to justify their condemnation for the want of it. But with how much more force does this argument apply to us, who have the Gospel, with so many other blessings, committed to us! If they were condemned for their unthankfulness, surely our guilt, if we are thankful, infinitely exceeds theirs.

Gratitude to others for benefits received is so plainly a duty, that it is superfluous to establish it by argument. Neither is it less obvious that the duty is great in proportion to the number and value of those benefits. It follows, therefore, that the duty of thankfulness to God is of the highest and most binding nature, since the number and value of his favours are infinitely great. I

do not think, indeed, that any persons will, in plain terms, deny the obligation of gratitude to God. Their want of thankfulness does not spring from any doubt, either as to the abstract principle or as the particular duty of gratitude to God. But the fact is, that they do not perceive God to be so truly a benefactor to them as he is. This point, then, requires to be made the subject of our consideration. I shall, therefore, in the present discourse endeavour to assign some of the causes from whence this mistake as to the beneficence of God arises.

1. One cause of our thanklessness to God is, that *we are apt rather to rest in second causes than to trace our blessings to their Primary Source.*—The view of man is generally too confined. He looks at what is near and immediate, rather than at what is more remote. Does he receive any good, it appears to be the fruit of his own labour, of his prudence, his exertions, or of the kindness of his friends. To these, then, the gratitude appears to be due; and to these, and these alone, it is generally offered. The fact, however, is, that the Original Mover and First Cause is the Being to whom our thanks are chiefly due. For—take a similar case. I am desirous of serving a friend. Perhaps the way in which I can most effectually serve him, is by persuading a third person to do something for his benefit; and I accordingly urge this person, and prevail with him. To whom, in this case, is my friend really indebted? Is it to me, or to the third person? While his thanks ought undoubtedly to be given to him, they are yet principally due to me. I am the grand mover and author of this benefit. My kindness is not diminished by the intervention of the means I have chosen to employ.—But although the validity of this reasoning may be admitted in the case of a human benefactor, it is too apt not to be admitted in considering the agency of the Almighty. The man who obtains food and raiment by his own labour does not always ascribe it to the bounty

of God. He feels little gratitude to him who first gave fertility to the earth; who waters the grain with his showers; who ripens it with his suns; and who adapts it to the powers of digestion and the purposes of nourishment. Suppose then you deemed it right, before you conferred a favour upon your child, to require of him, as a condition of the gift, some previous exercise or labour—would he, when he received it, argue justly, if he were to say, “I do not owe this to my parent, but to my own labour?” Would you not answer—“I appointed that labour as the means by which the end was to be secured: I promised the blessing; I pointed out the means, and ensured success to them.” The fact is, the favour is enhanced by the appointment of the means where a merciful end is secured to the use of those means. This we discover in other cases, but not where God is the Author of our success. But for the blindness of our understanding, or rather, perhaps, the ingratitude of our hearts, we should, at once, refer every mercy to the Supreme Cause, and observe with astonishment the variety, the extent, and the uniformity of his goodness. We should trace to his love for man the system of the universe. To give light to man, he created the splendour by which we are surrounded. To feed him, he caused food to spring out of the earth. To gratify him, he strewed the face of nature with flowers, and planted it with groves. To recruit his wearied body, he appointed rest and sleep. He gives success to our labours, and he breathes kindness into our friends.—The day approaches, my brethren, when we shall see that all blessings of all kinds, in all places, and at every period—the tenderness of parents, the affection of friends, blessings apparently the most spontaneous and the most costly, the comforts of life, and the joys of eternity—are all the gifts of a heavenly Hand. Would to God, that we could at once make this discovery! This indeed would open to us new prospects, would almost replace us in Paradise, would display to us its Author walking again amidst the scenes

of his own creation, and pronouncing every thing to be good. Why should we doubt his presence, merely because he is not revealed to the bodily eye? Why should we doubt his goodness, because he is pleased to impart it by the intervention of means and instruments? Paradise was not less replenished by his bounty, because he appointed Adam to dress the garden. The bounty of the monarch is not the less, because he distributes it by the hands of his ministers.

II. A second cause of our unthankfulness to God is *our defective view of his Providence*.—We feel grateful to God when we can readily and distinctly trace any mercy to his Providence. And this is at once recognized in peculiar and striking instances, as in cases of remarkable deliverance or unusual success. But it is greatly to be lamented, that even our acknowledgment of the agency of God, in some instances, should become a means of diminishing our sense of his agency in others. And this is the case, if, by acknowledging him to act only in particular cases, we exclude the sense of his general interference. The fact is, that God does not act in one case more than in another. He indeed more distinctly reveals to us his agency in some instances, that we may learn to recognize it in all. He sometimes ceases to employ instruments, in order to shew us, that when instruments are used, it is still he who works. Far be it from me to check the grateful emotions felt by any person who has experienced what is termed a *particular* Providence. But this I must say, that the very idea of a particular providence arises merely from the weakness of our understanding, and our imperfect conception of the Divine agency. For, if we saw the agency of God as it is seen in heaven, we should discover that his providence is as distinct, as particular, as minute in one case as another; that “particular” and “general” are the language of human infirmity; that what is signal and peculiar in our eyes, is common in his; that his hand is

always employed; that the "God of Israel never slumbereth nor sleepeth."

A striking instance of this misconception appears in the very meaning assigned to the word "*Providence*." Men call it a "*Providence*," when they receive some unexpected deliverance or blessing. But they do not call a loss, or a disease, or a misfortune, a *Providence*. Yet the term *Providence* means an instance of God's special care over us. And are we competent judges of the nature of the Divine dispensation towards us? It is certain that on this point the views of God differ most widely from our own. He calls that good which we deprecate as evil. In this case, then, whose views of good are to be surrendered? Shall God give us blessings only according to our conception of them? Or shall he exercise his own superior wisdom, and impart real good, even though we resist it, though we weep over it, though we pray against it? I fully believe, that in that invisible world, in which we shall be able to form a true conception of the goodness of God, we shall discover mercy where we once discerned only severity, and shall thank God, for the disappointments, the trials, the sufferings endured below, as the most signal instances of his providential care.—When it is inquired, "Who will shew us any good?" it is of great importance first to determine what is "good." Now, in truth and reason, that is good which is durable, which is eternal, which is holy, which unites the soul to God, the Fountain of all good: and that is evil which is transitory, which is polluted, which tends to no good moral end, which is sensual, which alienates the soul from God. Allow this to be just, and it gives a key to the Divine administration, which unlocks many of its difficulties, and establishes the goodness of God, where, perhaps, it is apt to be least recognized by his creatures. Many, for instance, are disposed to think they have no particular grounds for thankfulness; that their lot has even been hard, and their mercies few:

that the Providence of God has been rarely extended to them. But on what is this conception of the dealings of God with themselves founded? Evidently on this principle, that nothing is good but temporal good. If God had given them unusual success in their undertakings, or unexpected accessions to their fortunes, and health to enjoy their prosperity, then, indeed, they would have acknowledged themselves debtors to his mercy. But under different circumstances as to outward things, they acknowledge no such obligation. Thus falsely do we estimate our condition: Is it not evident, that such a judgment allows no importance to those gifts which are represented in Scripture as the chief of the Divine mercies? The wordly sufferer thinks little of the bread of eternal life which has been offered to him, of the inestimable gift of the Son of God, of the innumerable promises that, if he will trust God and serve him, God will be a Father to him, and will "never leave him nor forsake him." He forgets the unwearied patience and forbearance of God, sparing and blessing him when his sins called for vengeance. He forgets the strivings of the Spirit of God within him; his secret suggestions and admonitions to his conscience. He forgets the various mercies, even of a temporal kind, which he has enjoyed; the health, and the daily sustenance, the vigour of mind, the perfect use of his senses, the kindness of friends, the affection of a wife or children, the alleviations of sorrow and the mitigations of pain. All these are passed by as of no value. The mind is morbidly fixed upon something which it passionately desires, and foolishly esteems the only good, and cries, "Give me that, or I die. Give me that, or I possess no mercies." Thus Ahab pined and fell sick, and lay on his bed overwhelmed with distress, because he could not obtain the vineyard of Naboth for a "garden of herbs." He could not perceive that he had any mercies to be thankful for, while he could not gratify this wish of his heart. And thus it is with mankind in general. They look not at

what they possess, but at what they desire. Otherwise, on a just comparison, it would clearly appear, that the gifts even of the most afflicted, when duly estimated, exceed, in an infinite degree their privations and sufferings.

III. It is a third source of unthankfulness to God, that men *do not consider themselves indebted to him, except for peculiar or distinguishing mercies.*—For the mercies they share in common with others, they think little gratitude is due. Now I would wish such persons to consider, whether the diffusiveness and extent of the bounty of God form any just cause of unthankfulness. What would they think of a child who should say, “I am not indebted to my parent: for he feeds, and clothes, and takes care of my brothers and sisters, as well as myself!” Is it only some exclusive blessing which will excite your gratitude? Must you have something which distinguishes you from others, to call forth your thankfulness? Must your pride be gratified to make you thankful? Then, in truth, your gratitude is only a modification of your pride.—The fact is, my brethren, that the very extent of those blessings we share with others, demands additional gratitude. Indeed, such mercies are, in all respects, the most valuable. Compare such a gift as the light and heat of the sun, with any petty comforts granted to an individual, and observe its superiority. All private mercies may be compared to the dew which fell only upon the fleece of Gideon. But general mercies are like the dew of heaven descending, not alone upon the single fleece, but on the general surface of nature, refreshing the thirsty fields, and clothing them with verdure and beauty.—Surely the blessing cannot be lessened to me because others also are blessed. It is to be measured by the value of the gift, which is not diminished because others partake of it. Every one ought, in this respect, to consider himself as the only inhabitant of the world. In this case, how grateful would he be for the various mercies around him! But, if so, I desire to

know why the enjoyments of others should diminish his gratitude, when their happiness does not interfere with his, or the sense of their comforts diminish his own?

IV. But I pass on to notice a fourth cause of the unthankfulness of man,—a cause I am sorry to assign, because deeply disgraceful to human nature. I may say, then, that *the very number of the mercies of God tends to diminish our gratitude for them.* Painful and affecting consideration! Yet, alas! it is just. For, examine the common feelings of mankind: is it not evident that some extraordinary instance of the bounty of God excites more gratitude than the more valuable mercies of every day? The continued enjoyment of our senses, the nightly refreshment of sleep, make scarcely any impression, because they are common and continual. But if a sense, apparently lost, is restored: then we feel much gratitude to our Benefactor. The same disposition is seen in other cases. If a parent gives to his children something new and unexpected, they are more thankful than for their daily food and clothing. Thus, also, although the unexpected bounty of a friend may at first excite thankfulness; yet, if repeated every day, it is received with diminished gratitude, and at length the withholding of it is resented as an injury. If it be urged in reply, that this springs from a principle in human nature; I allow it to be so: but it is surely no amiable or excellent principle. It shews that the sense of gratitude does not keep pace with our mercies; but, on the contrary is blunted by the repetition of them;—an infirmity which argues a depraved nature and a corrupt heart: a disposition which is banished from heaven. Nor is this the full extent of the evil. From the same depravity it arises, that the very feeling of obligation is attended with pain, especially where the debt is large. Men love to be independent, and therefore hate an obligation. And, however affecting and terrible the fact may be, the

same spirit of independence denies even the gratitude we owe to God.

V. I add only one more source of unthankfulness to God; namely, a *prevailing view of his character as a just and holy, rather than as a kind and compassionate God.*

It is unfortunate for us, that when we first begin to hear or think of God, it is generally, rather as a Law-giver or Avenger of sin, than as a kind and merciful Parent. We enjoy his mercies, without knowing their Author. We find them in the world, and find thousands around us enjoying them in common with ourselves: but soon we discover pleasures we should wish to enjoy, or dispositions we should be glad to gratify. But we are forbidden, and, perhaps, told, "If you enjoy them, God will be angry—God will punish you." Who, then, is God? A Being, we begin to imagine, great indeed and powerful, but at the same time strict and terrible; a Being who will one day call us to judgment, and condemn to eternal torments those who disobey him. Thus, the first impressions of God formed on the mind (which have a considerable future influence on us) are unfavourable to Him; for we do not then perceive that his justice is only a modification of his mercy, and that he never acts arbitrarily in restraining or commanding his creatures, but only with a view to their good. On the contrary, we become accustomed to look upon God only as a Judge. We see and feel many evils in life, and are ready to ask, "Why does not God, if he is so merciful a Being, prevent them?" It is in vain, therefore, to expect much gratitude where such a view is entertained of the Divine Being. Dread is scarcely compatible with gratitude and love.

These, then, are some of the principal causes of that want of thankfulness to God which prevails in the world. We ascribe to second causes too much, and to the Primary Cause of all good, too little. We entertain false views of the providence of God. We mistake the nature of good. We underrate the mercies

enjoyed by us in common with others. We undervalue our own ordinary mercies. We early imbibe partial and unfavourable views of our Creator.

A very different idea then of God, my brethren, ought to prevail. We ought to look upon him as the best, most gracious, and most amiable Being; as our constant Benefactor, kindest Parent, wisest Counsellor, and unceasing Friend; whom, to know, is to love; in whose “presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.”

O that I could give *you* my beloved flock, such a view of the gracious God whom we serve, as would cause you to esteem his service “Perfect freedom!”—May the Spirit of God bless what I say, to promote, in some degree, so excellent an object! *Amen.*

SERMON XVI.

THE TARES AND THE WHEAT

Matt. xiii. 28—30.

The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

THE chapter from which my text is taken contains a variety of parables tending to illustrate the nature of that kingdom or church which Christ was about to establish in the earth: One circumstance is especially noticed—that it should not consist exclusively of those who, like the Head of the Church, should be holy and without guile; but that it should comprehend a mixture of the wicked and the righteous. This fact, which subsequent experience has but too sadly confirmed, is expressed and illustrated in the Parable of the Tares. “Good seed” was to be sown in the Church:—such doctrine was to be delivered as was calculated to produce the fruits of righteousness alone, and to collect within the Christian pale a “holy and peculiar people, zealous of good works.” But “an enemy” should

sow tares also. Corrupt principles and affections, proceeding from another hand than that from whence the good seed came, would spring up and produce men of corrupt minds and unholy lives. These, however, should be permitted, in the wisdom of God, to continue in the Church, together with the righteous, till the great day of judgment, in which a final separation should take place. The Christian Church, then, taking the word in its wider signification, consists of good and bad mixed together. It is like a "net cast into the sea, which gathers of every kind; which, when it is full, they draw to shore, and sit down and gather the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."

Since it has pleased Divine Wisdom thus to permit the tares and the wheat, the wicked and the righteous, to grow together, let us consider what duties arise from such a state of things, and what useful purpose it may be designed to promote.

1. We may learn from it, that *something more is required of us in order to be real christians, than the observance of external forms and ceremonies.*—It is not enough that we are baptized in the name of Christ, make a profession of faith in him, attend his house, are members of his Church, and are partakers of the most sacred rites which commemorate his death. All these things are common to the whole body of professing Christians; to the bad, as well as to the good; to the "tares" as well as to the "wheat." But from all this we can no more rationally conclude that we are really members of the Church of Christ here, and shall be partakers of the blessings of his kingdom above, than a Jew would conclude with certainty that he was entitled to the blessings promised to the seed of Abraham, because he was born of Jewish parents, and admitted by circumcision into the covenant of God. For, as the Apostle argued, "he is not a Jew" (entitled to all the blessings belonging to that chosen race) "who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one in-

wardly, and that is circumcision which is of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." So we may justly reason with regard to the Christian Church—"He is not a Christian who is one outwardly, neither is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart: that regeneration, of which baptism is only the outward and visible sign."

We are all, I fear, too apt to take it for granted that we are Christians (unless some very gross transgressions disturb our consciences,) because we are born in a Christian country, and bear the name of Christ: but the representation given in my text ought to render us careful that we possess a better title to Christianity. The great question with us should be "Are we members of the internal church?"—But what is the internal church? What is it which constitutes a right to that holy and venerable title of Christian? Where is the line to be drawn between those who are Christians by profession only, and those who are Christians indeed?—With respect to some persons, whose sins are numerous and great, there may be no hesitation in classing them among the "tares:"—and with respect to some righteous persons, whose righteousness shines forth like the sun in the noon-day, there can be no doubt but they belong to the number of real Christians. But the bulk of mankind may be said not to come under either of those descriptions. Their state is more indeterminate. It may indeed be truly said, that the distinction between merely nominal and real Christians consists in the wickedness of the one, and the righteousness of the other. This does establish an effectual separation between them in the nature of things; and this separation is clearly discerned by that God who "seeth the heart;" and who will one day "judge every man according to his works." But let it be remembered, that "wicked" and "righteous" are terms which bear a different import with different peo-

ple. Many persons think themselves righteous, at least not wicked, who, it is to be feared, will appear in a different light at the day of judgment. If, therefore, the righteous and the wicked are here mixed together under one common name of Christians; if it requires much attention to draw the line of distinction between them; and if it is to be feared that many persons deceive themselves with the hope of being Christians, because they are members of the external church, is it not incumbent upon us all seriously to inquire what constitutes the scriptural title to the name of Christian, and impartially to examine whether we may claim it? Let us not appeal, for the safety of our state, to the general customs of the world. The "tares" grow up in the church, as well as the "wheat." Let us not make our boast of external forms and privileges. The wicked, as well as the righteous, may be partakers of them. Nothing but a lively faith in Christ, influencing the heart, and producing the fruits of righteousness, can render us Christians in the sight of God.

II. Hitherto we have noticed only the duty which the mixture of the righteous and the wicked ought to impress upon us, of examining seriously to which class we belong. It is proper next to state *some peculiar advantages which may result from such a dispensation, both to the wicked and to the righteous.*

1. And first let us consider the *advantages arising to the wicked* from this mixture in the Church of Christ.

If it be any mercy that sin is in any measure restrained, it is a mercy that the righteous are continued in the world. For their presence, in a variety of ways, tends to stop the progress of sin, and to promote the practice of holiness. The influence which they possess, not only by their unblemished life, but by means of their natural connexions, by the ties of relationship and friendship, is used by them for the most important purposes. Their conduct in their necessary intercourse with the world, their maxims, their general spir-

it and temper, are like leaven, which pervades the mass, and gives a character to the whole. If all persons were wicked, it is obvious the evil would extend itself far more widely and rapidly than when checked, as it now is, by the presence and holy endeavours of the righteous.

Again: the wicked derive great benefit from the presence of the righteous, in the participation of many mercies and blessings which are communicated to an unworthy world for their sake. Ten righteous persons would have saved Sodom. The whole posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were spared and blessed, through many successive generations, on account of the piety of their ancestors. Children inherit the prayers of their parents,—often the most valuable legacy which they can receive; and a blessing descends upon a whole family, or nation, for the sake of the righteous contained in it.

But the great purpose for which the righteous appear to be left among the wicked is to instruct and reform them. The wicked through the presence of the good, have the benefit of holy examples. Hence, they not only see in the Bible the excellence of religion, but they have proof of the practicability of its duties, in the lives of those of “like passions” with themselves; of men endued with a nature as frail, and assaulted by as many temptations. Perhaps their friend, perhaps their brother, once, like themselves, careless and corrupt, is now become a devout worshipper of God, and lives in obedience to his will. What a call is this from God to themselves! What an instance brought home to them, of the excellency of holiness and the power of grace! What just remonstrances also are now likely to be made to them; what affectionate entreaties, and what constant attention paid to their spiritual welfare! If they continue in sin, they have to resist the reproaches of conscience, and the force of example. What can they now plead in apology for their conduct? Will they say, that the customs of the world in which they live

are too strong to be resisted? They see before them those who have effectually resisted these customs.—Will they plead the vivacity of youth, the power of their natural temper, or the violence of their passions? They see those who are as young as themselves, who were once, perhaps, not merely as much, but even more, under the power of their passions, now living under the controul of religion.—Do they urge the distraction of business? There are some employed in the same occupations with themselves who, nevertheless make salvation their principal concern.—Is poverty or prosperity, is sickness or health made the plea for neglecting their souls? Let them look around: witnesses stand up on every side, to testify that these circumstances form no exception to the possibility of serving God.—Are they at a loss to know what is real religion; or, through inattention, do they neglect to read the description of it in the Sacred Writings? Behold the living model set before their eyes.—If, in the society of the righteous, they must be struck with something in their views, sentiments, manners, and habits, contrary to their own, which at once condemns themselves and supplies the model they need: they “see their good works,” and learn to “glorify their father which is in heaven.”

2. Let us, secondly, consider in what light the *righteous* should view this mixture of the righteous and the wicked in the world, and what advantageous influence it ought to have on their conduct.—Is it true, then, that you who make a profession of religion are as “a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid?” Are you the “salt of the earth?” Is it by the shining of your light before men, that they are to be led to glorify your father which is in heaven? Is your example to be the comment upon Scripture? And is your conduct to be the most powerful preacher of righteousness to an *unrighteous* world? Are the honour of religion, the glory of Christ, and the salvation of your fellow-creatures, in a great measure intrusted to you? “*What manner*

of persons, then, ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." Say not with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" but consider, that it has pleased God to continue the righteous amongst the wicked, in order that the latter may be benefited. Let the impression, then, they receive from you, be favourable to the interests of religion. Little will people regard what they hear, if what they see does not correspond with it. The tongue may deceive, but actions speak the truth; and to them alone will the world give credit. Remember also, that one instance of evil, one inadvertent action, one unguarded expression—I had almost said, one imprudent look—has more power to harden, than many righteous deeds have to reform. Consider, moreover, how necessary it is you should use all the influence you possess over others for beneficial purposes. Your children, your servants, your relations, your friends, are placed by Providence immediately under your care; and from what they hear from you and see in you, they will form, in a great measure, those ideas of the utility and necessity of religion which will influence their future life.

It is an obvious inference to be drawn by the righteous from the mixture of bad and good in the Church, that they themselves are placed here to be tried. True friendship is proved only by a season of adversity; true wisdom discovers itself in difficult and intricate cases; and, in like manner, true piety displays itself in a world of temptation and corruption. It would be an easy thing to be religious where all are religious; where the strong tide of custom impels us in that direction. But God places his servants, for the trial and improvement of their piety, in a sinful world. They have to struggle with evil customs, and to display their love to him and their regard for religion, not merely before a few persons agreeing with them in sentiment, but before the world, and that part of it "which lieth in wickedness." The reality of Daniel's fear of God was proved, by his persevering in prayer, when it was forbidden. The

sincerity of the faith of the primitive Christians was tried by the persecutions they endured. To suffer reproach, or contempt, or loss, for Christ's sake, is often more difficult than to be active in exertions for his cause. In the world, in short, there are abundant opportunities for the trial of the reality of our principles and piety.

A further advantage arising to the righteous from their continuance in this evil world is, that it furnishes them with greater opportunities of honouring God than even if they were removed at once into the kingdom of heaven. For in heaven many holy qualities cannot be exercised, for which we have here continual opportunities. Here is the "faith" and "patience of the saints:" there faith will be superseded by sight; and patience will have no place, where there is no suffering. Here we have the opportunity of standing up faithfully and courageously for the honour of God, and of proving our love to him by our actions: but in heaven there will be no evil customs to resist, no sinful affections to mortify, no bad men whom we may reclaim, and whom we may thus lead to join us in glorifying God.

Learn then, O Christian, to value this life as an opportunity of honouring God; very short, indeed, but very precious. We are too apt not to discover the value of opportunities till they are lost. We lament that we live in a world of sorrow and sin, and we hope soon to be admitted into a more pure and holy residence. But, when admitted there, if any thing could give us pain, it would be to consider how many opportunities, once possessed, of honouring God, are now irretrievably lost. *There* will be no sick to visit, no naked to clothe, no afflicted to relieve, no weak to succour, no faint to encourage, no corrupt to rebuke or profligate to reclaim. A new sphere of virtues will present themselves; brighter, indeed, and more glorious than those which presented themselves on earth, but not affording such opportunities for manifesting the

love we bear to God. Happy are they who labour "while it is called to-day."

III. Having thus examined the subject proposed to you, I shall conclude with two observations of a practical nature.

1. In the first place, the mixture of the righteous and the wicked, far from supplying to the righteous an excuse for not profiting so much as they ought by the means of grace, is rather an argument for their giving themselves up more fully to do the work of God, while the opportunity of doing so is afforded.—And how infinitely important is the present period of their existence! How much may they do in it, both to glorify God and to benefit their fellow sinners, and also to qualify themselves for the inheritance of the saints in light! Actuated by these views, let them be careful to improve their necessary intercourse with the wicked, to their mutual advantage. Let them not deem the time spent in their society lost. There are means of turning it to good account, which a mind duly sensible of the infinite value of the present life will discover, and a heart impressed with the sense of Divine things will eagerly embrace. Let them beware of esteeming the present state of things useless and uninteresting; of merely *suffering* life as a kind of necessary evil. Let them not so engage in earthly pursuits as to forget the noble ends for which a Christian is destined, and the manner in which he is called to accomplish them. Let them always remember, that, as there is an essential difference between the tares and the wheat, such a difference must also discover itself between the righteous and the wicked; a difference which ought not to be lessened by a gradual accommodation to the customs, and manners, and maxims, and habits of the world. And, in fine, let them always bear in mind, that it is the "fruits of righteousness" which constitute the essential difference between the "wheat" and "tares," and which will regulate the final separation of the good and bad. They who have lived together here in the

external church will be separated by the angels, "who shall gather out of the kingdom of Christ all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth: then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

2. Lastly, while we see the "wheat" and "tares" thus permitted to grow up together till the harvest, let us call to mind both the difference of their nature and the cause of that difference. The tares, or weeds, cannot produce food for the nourishment of man. In like manner, there is an absolute difference of nature between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous possess a new nature implanted in them by the Holy Spirit. They are become "new creatures in Christ Jesus." Once unprofitable and corrupt, through faith in Christ they have been made partakers of the influence of the Holy Ghost.—Such, then, is at once the difference and the cause of it. Christ has become a quickening principle in them. He giveth life to the dead, strength to the weak, wisdom to the ignorant, and grace to the corrupt. Let us therefore, my brethren, call upon him to plant us in his field, to watch over our growth, to water us with the dew of his grace, and, at length, to "gather us into his garner."

SERMON XVII.

ON INDECISION IN RELIGION.

1 Kings xviii. 21.

How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.

THERE are few persons, perhaps indeed there are none, who have renounced the service of God from a deliberate principle. Few intend to forsake God, or directly to oppose his will. But too many do so indirectly, through negligence or indecision. They do not seriously consider who God is, and what he requires. They do not lay to heart their obligations to him. They acknowledge in general, that they ought to pay obedience to him; perhaps they intend it, and even attempt to serve him in some points; but they allow their attention to be occupied, and their resolutions to be frustrated by other objects. They lose sight of God and his laws; and then they indulge their own evil passions, and sin against him. The sense they have of their obligation to serve him is not sufficiently strong to fix them steadily and uniformly in the path of duty. Objections against a strict obedience arise, which they take no pains to combat. They waver

in their principles, and still more in their practice. Their whole conduct, as to religion, is indecisive. They halt between two opinions, and thus neither serve God nor follow sin unreservedly.

This was the character of the Ten Tribes of Israel, to whom Elijah addressed the words of my text. That was an unhappy day for the Church on which the Ten Tribes revolted from the kingdom of Judah, and erected a distinct kingdom. The whole religious œconomy of the Law was founded upon the supposition, that the temple was the centre of worship for all the children of Israel; thither were the tribes to go up. But as the permission of this union in religious service would have tended to bring the kingdoms again under one head, it was the policy of the kings of Israel to introduce variety into the worship. For the dissolute and profane, temples were built to Baal: for the religious part of Israel, altars were erected to Jehovah. Thus the people halted between two opinions. A diversity of religious opinions produced, as it usually does, an unwarrantable species of candour; an indifference about the truth, and a sceptical spirit concerning it. Without denying Jehovah to be God, they inclined to believe Baal to be a god also. They acknowledged Jehovah to be Lord; but they presumed to worship him upon unhallowed altars, and in places unauthorised by his Law. Thus there was no zeal for the honour of God. Men learned to view, with almost equal regard, the altars of Jehovah and the neighbouring temples of Baal. They neither served Baal nor the Lord heartily, but contented themselves with paying a superficial worship to either. This indifference in religion the prophet justly reprobates. "How long," says he, "will ye halt between two opinions?" Fluctuate no longer in this manner. Baal and Jehovah cannot both be gods. Come therefore to a decision; determine which is truly God. If, upon serious examination, you discover Baal to be the true God, worship him; obey his rites, and with all that zeal which he requires:—but if Jehovah be the

true God, then follow him, and him only; worship him with your whole hearts: give yourselves up to him: fulfil all that he has commanded.

If we allow for the present difference of circumstances, how many shall we find among ourselves who are influenced by the same spirit and adopt the same conduct as the Israelites! They do not despise religion: they acknowledge its necessity, and they approve of its precepts. They are shocked at the profane and dissolute part of mankind, and wonder that men dare to act in a manner so contrary to the commands of their Creator. They attend the house of God, and hear with pleasure the preaching of his word; they are to a certain extent religious; but they are far from serving God with their whole heart. Their religion amounts only to a general approbation of what is excellent, a faint desire to be more holy, and a compliance with those precepts of God which cost them little trouble and self-denial. There is nothing decided in their conduct; they halt between two opinions; they attempt to unite the service of God and mammon: they make a compromise between religion and the world; and thus they neither take pains to know the whole of their duty, nor are they solicitous to live up to what they know. They are not at ease in their consciences with respect to their state, and yet they are not so dissatisfied with it as seriously to set about a reformation: but they go on from year to year in a middle course between total negligence and real religion.

I conceive, my brethren, the state which I have described to be very common, and particularly in those places where religion is much insisted on, and where a total neglect of it is therefore generally known to be very wrong. Perhaps there may be some persons of this description in the assembly to which I am now speaking. Do I not address some whose consciences already say to them. "Thou art the man?" Permit me, then, to apply to you the words of the Prophet, "How long will ye halt between two opinions?" If the

approbation of men, or if the possession of the things of this world be the only good, then pursue it with your whole heart; but if the Lord be God, and if he demands your entire service, then follow him faithfully and fully.

I. In treating of this subject, I shall first point out the evils of your present state.

These are indeed very various. If your heart is not right with God, however the decency of your conduct may be respected, or what is amiable in your character may be admired, I am constrained to consider you as yet destitute of a truly religious principle. You want the main spring which should move and guide your actions. Two forces operate upon you, which are contrary to each other; and thus the full effect of each is obstructed. You are not honest and sincere; and without honesty and sincerity, what real good can be expected? You receive no full enjoyment from any thing you do. Too much enlightened to join in those sinful pleasures in which the profane and dissolute find their happiness, you are excluded from their enjoyments; and on the other hand, you enter too little into the spirit of religion to derive happiness from that source. You desire what you cannot have without contracting guilt: you have no taste for that which you might enjoy. Miserable state! what can be more wretched than to have conscience perpetually disapproving your conduct, and to be consequently doing habitual violence to conscience. Alas! seldom or never are you cheered with its encouraging testimony, that all is well with you—that you have borne a decisive testimony to the Gospel, and faithfully followed the truth. When does it whisper peace to you, in the prospect of illness or death, and say, “Fear not; the Lord whom you have served will be your defence and your comfort?” On the contrary, it so speaks that you choose rather to stifle its voice and to avoid reflection respecting your final state. Nor is it to conscience only that you have done violence: the Spirit of God has been

grieved; he will not reside in the heart which gives him no cordial reception; he will not seal those to the day of redemption who halt between two opinions, who serve mammon as well as God, and are unfaithful to the light which has been communicated to them. Look then into your condition. What progress have you made in a religious course? Are you not barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord? Do you not blush to think that there has been in you no evident improvement, perhaps, for years together? Is not even the light you once enjoyed darkened, so that now your feelings are benumbed, and religious truths have lost much of the glory in which at first they appeared? What do you experience of the consolations of the Gospel?—You see others happy in the knowledge of Christ. They possess peace of conscience: they have a full hope of immortality: they walk uprightly with God, and obtain dominion over sin: you see them holy in their lives and happy in their deaths. But when do you enjoy such peace? When do you hold communion with God? When do you, through faith in Christ, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory?—Do you inquire the reason why they are so much more happy than you? I answer; It is not because they have more learning, or a better understanding, or passions naturally less corrupt:—it is that their hearts are right with God. Their eye is single, and therefore their whole body is full of light. Your eye is not single; hence all is darkness. You possess neither light nor hope, nor grace nor peace; nor do you derive satisfaction from the world. Your conduct brings neither credit to your religious profession, comfort to yourself, nor glory to God.

Let not those who thus halt between two opinions, think that I speak too harshly. The danger is, lest they speak too smoothly to themselves. Great evils, it will be allowed require strong remedies; but the evil of their own case is not seen by them to be great, and therefore they are content that mere pallia-

tives should be administered. I wish to shew them that their state is dangerous in proportion as they imagine it to be safe. Were they totally profligate, they might admit the necessity of a total change in their principles: but now they conceive a little amendment to be sufficient, and thus the remedies to which they resort are too weak to do them any good.

Oh! let me convince you, that religion requires the whole heart; and that if your heart be not right with God, your conduct cannot fail to be unworthy of your Christian profession,—your views of religion will probably be cloudy, and your souls comfortless,—you will be strangers to that peace which passeth all understanding, and to that hope which is full of immortality: in a word, you will be wretched and self-condemned without either the spirit or the consolations of religion.

II. What then, it will be said, are we to do? If you ask this question in all seriousness and sincerity, I refer you to the words of the prophet: “How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, follow him.”—These words imply, first, that you should deliberately consider; and secondly, that you should act according to the result of that consideration.

I. The prophet requires the children of Israel to reflect whether Baal or Jehovah were God.—In like manner would I exhort you seriously to consider whom you will serve, God or mammon. Our Lord instructed all his disciples to sit down first, and count the cost before they became his disciples. His service was not to be without trials and dangers, and therefore they were to ask themselves beforehand whether they could bear them, and whether they deemed the comforts and hopes he set before them a sufficient compensation. Take this advice. Contemplate, on one hand, all the pleasures and advantages which the world can offer: give them their full value: observe how agreeable they are to your present nature; how gratifying to your corrupt appetites: set before you all the earthly

happiness which it is not improbable you may possess, imagine yourself to meet with great success, to enjoy an envied prosperity, to escape disease and calamity, vexation and care, and to live long in this scene of temporal felicity, not a cloud obscuring the continual sunshine of your life: contrive, as Solomon determined to do, that nothing shall obstruct your happiness: that your pleasures shall be too refined to satiate at once, and that, though you withhold nothing from yourself which your sight desires, yet you will not sin so grossly as to incur either loss of reputation or the accusation of a tormenting conscience. Is not this as much as this world can promise? If it is prudent to give up religion for any thing upon earth, it surely may be sacrificed for this. Make, then, the determination. Form a deliberate plan, according to which you shall be free from all religious restraint. Let this life be your portion. Abide by the system you have established, and follow it resolutely and to the end. Cast off the fear of God, regard to a future state, and all apprehension of an hereafter.

But methinks I hear you reply: "This is more than I can do. What would it profit me, if I were to gain the whole world, and lose my own soul? Even were I to have all that I could wish, I must die, I must appear before God. Ah, what can be considered as an equivalent for the loss of the soul?"

Your reply is indeed just. Yes: it is a truth which I pray God to engrave in the deepest lines upon your heart. The man is wretched beyond description, whatever be his temporal enjoyments, who has not the blessing of God. "In his favour is life, and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore." Contemplate Dives and Lazarus, and say whether you do not feel this to be true. Make, then, a fair estimate of what you will both lose and gain by a life devoted to God. Place, on the one side, that loss of some of the pleasures of life and of the favour of the world to which you will be subject; calculate the self-denial you must

exercise, the conflict you must sustain: do not delude yourself in respect to any of the sacrifices which must be made; know their full number and weight:—but at the same time, estimate, on the other hand, at its true worth, the favour and blessing of your Creator. Take into your account the value of that peace of God which will dwell in your soul, the privileges of his adopted children, the blessedness of drawing nigh to him in fervent prayer, and of enjoying frequent and delightful communion with him. Consider the sweetness of meditation upon his promises accompanied with a humble hope that they are yours. View the felicity of being delivered from the slavery of evil passions, and of enjoying that liberty which is found in the service of God. Think of the light of God's countenance lifted up upon you, of having the Spirit of God for your Guide and Comforter, and of being partaker of all the benefits purchased by the precious blood of the Son of God shed upon the cross. Think also of being united to all the excellent and faithful in the whole world, and of being partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. Reflect upon the privilege of having God for your father, Christ for your Redeemer, the Spirit for your Sanctifier, and heaven for your eternal home. Carry your thoughts beyond this terrestrial scene, and see what God has laid up for them that love him; a happiness pure as heaven, and durable as eternity. Sum up these various blessings, and then can you halt between two opinions? Can there be ground for a moment's hesitation? By what sorcery are we so bewitched, as not to perceive that God alone is the Source of happiness, and that they are vain who depart from him?

Oh, thou Fountain and Source of all that is truly good! Thou who didst contrive and form the beautiful frame of this earth, with all that ministers to the good of man! Thou who didst create the happiness of the world of spirits, and who diffusest by thy presence unspeakable joy amongst the blessed inhabitants of heaven! Thou being, full of glory, bliss, and goodness, and

who alone communicatest them to others! How art thou injured, when we imagine that thy service is not perfect freedom! Into what intellectual darkness and depravity are we sunk, when we compare thy service with that of an idol, or of this polluted world! How is it that we do not intuitively perceive that obedience to thee is the true happiness of man, and that we can have peace in our souls in proportion only as our will is united to thine! Dissipate the mists which cloud our sight, and make us to feel that we are wretched when we depart from thee!

III. "If then the Lord be God, follow him."—If, my brethren, you are convinced, as I hope you are, and as I am sure you ought to be, that there is no real peace but in God, determine to seek your happiness only in his service. How this should be done, I shall endeavour in some degree to explain.

1. Be persuaded, that *those things in which your corrupt mind promises you pleasure do but deceive you.*—They are all splendid delusions: they are lying vanities. Have you not found that they have already deluded you? How long must you be misled before you will be convinced? How often be disappointed before you are persuaded that the ways of sin are not happiness, but death?

2. Lay it down as a maxim, that *whatever sacrifice for God appears painful, does but appear to be so.*—To suffer for religion's sake is not so dreadful as you imagine. What though you encounter the frowns of the world; the smiles of God will more than compensate for them. What though self denial be your lot; yet it carries with it its own reward: and self-indulgence, as you have found, does not give the felicity it promised. Be assured, that God by religion points out the way to happiness, while Satan by sin directs you in the road to misery:—shall you hesitate which path to take?

3. Be persuaded, that *true peace and comfort are only to be enjoyed by those whose hearts are right with God.*

—To halt between God and mammon is to possess the comforts of neither, but the pains of both. Give yourself, therefore, up unreservedly to God. Act for him openly and explicitly. Renounce all temporising maxims. Shew plainly, that you have cast off the fear of the world, and the love of it; that you are not ashamed to confess Christ before men, nor unwilling to bear his cross.

4. Remember also, that *you must be consistent*.—Your conduct must be good as well as your profession bold. Do not parley with any sin. Do not love the things of the world, while you renounce the men of the world. Endeavour not merely to keep within the verge of salvation, but advance into the midst of the Church of Christ. A lukewarm, temporising spirit has been your bane. To combine a little, and only a little, religion, with much of the world, has been your fault. Thus you have done the work of the Lord deceitfully. Now be honest and sincere in his service.

5. *Make a stand against whatsoever you know to be wrong*—Reverence your conscience. One single compliance makes a dreadful inroad upon your peace. It brings darkness and guilt into your soul. “Beloved,” says St. John, “if our conscience condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.”

6. And lastly, *walk in the Spirit*.—Look to Jesus Christ, the Author and Giver of all spiritual strength. Let all that is past teach you this great truth, that if left to yourself you will either have no religion, or that only from which you will derive a poor lifeless form of godliness without spirit or power. Christ must be all in all to you, and in the power of his Spirit you must trust. Consider, that he is made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. Severed from him, you can do nothing. Abide therefore in him: pray to him, confide in him; read the promises of his word for the confirmation of your faith. Receive him as your Prophet, Priest, and King; and then you shall know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

SERMON XVIII.

THE FALL AND PUNISHMENT OF DAVID ILLUSTRATED.

2 Sam. xii. 7.

And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.

IT is a circumstance worthy of notice in the Sacred Historians, that, in their accounts of the servants of God; they record their vices as well as their virtues: they represent them in their real character, and attempt neither to palliate their faults nor to exaggerate their excellencies. The history of David is, in this respect, remarkable. He is represented, on the one hand, as zealous in the service of God, attached to his worship, in no instance giving way to idolatry, the prevailing sin of the times, and as honoured for these qualities with the high title of “the man after God’s own heart.” On the other hand, his character is described as stained with some gross offences; and both these offences, with all their aggravations, and the exemplary punishment which followed them, are faithfully recorded.

The sins of David, to which the words of my text refer, and the effects which followed them, are the subjects I would propose for our consideration on the present occasion: in order to which, I shall examine in detail several parts of his history.

I. *The circumstances of David previous to his fall* deserve our attention — For several years he had been in a state of great trouble. Even his life had been often endangered. He was haunted by Saul like a partridge upon the mountains, and compelled to take up his residence in the caves of the desert. But it was not in this state of trial and affliction that he offended. During this period, we see him exercising, in a remarkable degree, the faith, the resignation, the humility, the patience, the meekness of the servant of God. But now God had brought his troubles to a close. He had bestowed on him, first, the crown of Judah, and afterwards that of Israel. He had blessed him with prosperity on every side, and had given him “the necks of his enemies.” For some years he had been the most powerful monarch in that quarter of the world. These were his circumstances when he fell. Now it would be too much to affirm that these circumstances were the direct causes of his sin. They may, however have tended indirectly to it, by inducing that state of the heart in which it is least qualified to encounter temptation. Such is often the effect of prosperity. It cherishes a worldly and sensual taste. It indisposes the soul for self-denial, watchfulness, and humility; graces not called into exercise in prosperity. It relaxes our application to the Throne of Grace; for where there is a fulness of enjoyment, there is likely to be little ardour in prayer; where the soul is satisfied with earthly blessings, it does not aspire to such as are spiritual and heavenly. Perhaps prosperity thus operated upon David. Perhaps he had become less watchful, less fervent in secret prayer, less afraid of sin, more vain, more confident, more disposed to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. And thus temptations, not formidable

in adversity, at once overwhelmed the soul disordered and enervated by prosperity.

Surely this statement may teach us to recognize and lament the depravity of human nature. The very mercies of God are made the occasions of sin. Such is man, that he would probably be less guilty if God were less compassionate. This statement also may serve to reconcile us to the afflictions which prevail in the world. Perhaps the removal of these might tend, more than any other cause, to the increase of sin; and thus, in the end, to the final increase and aggravation of misery.

II. Consider, next, *the peculiar temptation which is suffered to present itself to David, and the way in which he encountered it*—This, my brethren, is a world of trial. Christ himself was tempted; and it is in the order of Divine Providence, that no one should wholly escape it. Temptation indeed has its uses as well as its dangers. Perilous as it is, the Lord can and will overrule it for good, to those who humbly and devoutly call upon him.—But let us follow David through his trial. The temptation arose—a temptation sudden and great. Now then was the trial, in what manner he would act; and doubtless there had been times innumerable when this servant of God would at once have fled from the temptation, and thus have broken its spell. He would have “resisted the devil,” and the “devil would have fled” from him. But now alas! he gives way to the seduction. He calmly descends from his palace with a determination to bring the evil of his heart into act, and to perpetrate the crime which the tempter had suggested to him. This we may conceive to have been the turning point in David’s career. No man can altogether resist the approach of unsolicited temptation. No man can, perhaps, entirely prevent such temptation laying hold of the imagination and feelings. But to parley with it, this is a voluntary act. And it is in this, in its being a voluntary act, that the guilt of sin consists. Thus, in the case of David, “lust conceived, and brought forth sin.” The “anointed of the Lord”

is "taken in the snare of the ungodly," and goes "like an ox to the slaughter, not considering that it is for his life."

Oh! had David paused but for one moment: had he retired awhile to deliberate upon his conduct: had he but put up one prayer for Divine help: had he passed on even to the duties of his kingly office, so as to divert his thoughts into a different channel; the snare might have been broken, and he have escaped. But, alas! David is left a melancholy monument of what the best man may become when he forsakes his God, and when his God, in consequence abandons him.

III. Observe, thirdly, *the state of David, after his first sin, and his progress to new offences.*—What must David have felt after the perpetration of the first crime? Immediately the sense of the Divine presence, the inspiring hope of Divine favour and eternal glory, would withdraw from him. Did he at the hour of prayer, according to custom, go up to the temple of the Lord, methinks the holy rites and the sacred place would reproach him, and say "We are pure." Perhaps his own sweet Psalms might upbraid him with that emphatic question "Who shall go up to the house of the Lord, who shall ascend his holy hill? Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart."—Does he retire to his closet, and there touch the sacred harp? Alas! his heart would be in no tune for the songs of Zion.—Would he join those with whom he once "went in company to the house of God, and took sweet counsel in Divine things?" The sense of guilt would leave his tongue dumb, and his heart hard.—How could he meet his servants, or converse with those whom he used to reprove or exhort? Alas! their looks, intently fixed upon him, and meaning more than could be uttered, would confound him.—Does he join his partner in sin? The guilty hours spent with her would be embittered by reflections on the ruin he had brought upon her soul.—But let us return to his history. The consequences of his crime were becoming visible, and the once noble

and generous David now resorts to low artifices to conceal his guilt. He sends for the injured husband. He treats him with a subtlety unworthy both of himself and of his loyal subject, endeavouring to impose upon him a spurious offspring. How must the noble refusal of the brave warrior to sleep in his bed while the "ark of God was abroad," and the armies of Israel were encamped to fight the battles of his beloved though treacherous sovereign, have stung him to the heart! And doubtless this was but one of many daggers which his crime had planted in his bosom. When deceit, however, could not prevail on Uriah, a fresh crime must compel him; a crime at which the pure spirit of the monarch would once have shuddered. But neither would this avail; the faithful soldier, even when overcome with wine, refuses to yield to the royal tempter. What could be done? Crime leads on to crime. David, therefore, urged by a dread of detection (though what was human detection to a man already judged of God!), determines to add murder to adultery; to destroy one of the most faithful of his servants; to murder him even whilst shedding his blood in his own defence; to murder him by an act of perfidy of the basest kind!

Here let us pause to consider what David once was, and what he is now become. Once, he was the leader of the Lord's people, the first in the sanctuary, the zealous restorer of Divine worship, the sweet singer of Israel. Who, that had once heard his pious melody, his devout addresses to God, could have conceived that he would so fall? Had it been predicted, would the prediction have been credited? Who shall not tremble for himself, when he contemplates the fall of David?

IV. But let us next pass on to a more advanced stage of his history. *The criminal schemes of David had now taken effect*, and Uriah could no more disturb the bed of the seducer and murderer. But when there remained no obstacle to enjoyment, the Divine hand suddenly arrested him in his guilty career

God sent Nathan the prophet to convince him of his guilt.

Let us praise God, my brethren, who was pleased thus graciously to interpose to save his servant from everlasting destruction. It doubtless was an act of the Divine mercy by which he was rescued; for would a heart so hardened, a conscience so seared, a soul so habituated to sin, have returned spontaneously to God? It is, however, perhaps, allowable to conceive that his former prayers might come up as a memorial before God, and plead for him who now could not plead for himself. In prayer, we often cast in the seed of an harvest which will be reaped, perhaps, at some remote period. Who can say, when he prays to be delivered from temptation; of which he does not now discern even the distant approach, how greatly such a prayer may be needed, and how immediately and mercifully it may be answered?

But to return—The mode in which it pleased God to touch the heart of the offender is remarkable. To the claims of justice and the feelings of generosity, David, though greatly fallen, was not entirely lost. Therefore, in a parable constructed so as to touch him at these yet accessible points, the prophet addresses his conscience, and rouses him even to pass sentence on himself in pronouncing a severe verdict on a supposed criminal. What self-deceit is there in the human heart! David kindles with indignation against the man who takes a lamb from his poor neighbour, and yet remains insensible to the flagrant iniquity of seduction and murder. At length, however, he opens his eyes upon his guilt; his heart is softened; he stands self-condemned before the prophet. The account, especially of this part of the transaction, given by the sacred historian, is very brief. It might hence appear, that the penitence of David was comprised in the single expression, "I have sinned against the Lord;" and that the prophet immediately answered, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." But it is not unusual in Scripture

to represent one event as immediately following another, when in fact a considerable time intervened. And this is probably the case here. There may have been two visits of Nathan to David, at a considerable interval of time; one in which the judgment was denounced; the other, in which the message of mercy was communicated to the penitent. However this may have been, we shall perceive, by comparing this history with the language of David himself, in the Psalms, that his repentance was sincere, and his grief profound. In the Fifty-first Psalm, a psalm of penitence for this transgression, we find the most humbling confession of guilt and misery, and the most fervent supplication for mercy. In the Thirty-second Psalm, written, as it would appear, on the same occasion, we find him speaking of his "bones waxing old through his weeping all the day long," and of the hand of the Lord being so heavy upon him, that his "moisture was turned into the drougt of summer." In any case, we know that neither David nor any other sinner could return to God but by the path of deep humiliation and unfeigned repentance.

V. We come, finally, to notice the dreadful *consequence of this transgression*.—Where God forgives, he does not always wholly spare. He may so pardon the sin as not to inflict upon the sinner eternal condemnation, and yet punish him severely. And such was the case of David. Besides the wound his soul had sustained, and which, perhaps, might never afterwards be entirely healed, we find the remainder of David's life harassed by perpetual sorrows. He had acted perfidiously to his servant; and his own son acts perfidiously to him. He had committed adultery with Uriah's wife, and Absalom committed adultery with his wives; David indeed secretly, but Absalom in the sight of the sun. He had exposed Uriah to the sword of his enemies; and behold he himself is driven from his throne before his enemies, and his palace is defiled with blood. Indeed, from that time the "sword departed not from

his house;" but violence and dissension, and blood rendered the remainder of his life wretched: so that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, acquainted with his sin, would doubtless discover the hand of God in his calamities, and say,—“This hath God wrought,”—for they would perceive that it was his work.

Having thus passed through the several stages of this affecting history, I shall beg, in conclusion, to found upon it a few practical observations.

1. In the first place, it may teach us to *guard against declension in grace, and watch against temptation*.—If temptation is urgent, my brethren, flee from it, and think of the fall of David. Alas! where is the man that may say, “I shall stand,” when David fell? Indulge no presumptuous security. He who at any preceding period should have predicted the fall of David, would have been charged, perhaps, with predicting impossibilities. Alas! our strength is in the consciousness of our weakness, and in earnest prayer to God for help and support. Let no man rely upon his early virtues—David the inspired Psalmist fell.

2. A second lesson to be learned from the fall of David, is that of *charity and tenderness in judging of those who fall*.—Call them not, my brethren, as the world are too apt to call them, hypocrites. David was no hypocrite—but David fell. And where is the man, who, if solicited by strong temptation, and unrestrained by Divine grace, might not fall to lower depths than David?

3. Finally, let us *beware of employing the fall of David as a plea for sin*, and of presuming that *such a restoration as his to favour and holiness will be granted to ourselves*.—Before we can build upon the hope of a restoration such as his, our circumstances must be those of David. To sanction such hopes, we should resemble him in his zeal and love, in the prayers by which we have supplicated, and the songs by which we have glorified, our God. And, even then, have we any security for pardon, any promise of mercy, any right to

expect that a prophet should be sent to rouse us to a sense of our condition? Was such a restoration due to David? Is God bound or pledged to bring the sinner back who wilfully departs from him? Nor is this all: should the pardon be granted, as in the case of David, and the restoration to God take place, consider, if your restoration resemble his, it is no unqualified blessing. His sorrow was acute. All the billows of the Divine indignation seemed to pass over him. The arrow of God pursued him. The "iron entered into his soul."

Thus, whatever encouragement the story of David may supply to the real penitent, (and to him, blessed be God, it does give encouragement), it affords none to the sinner who, presuming upon the Divine mercy for restoration and pardon, daringly violates the Divine commandments.

In a word, the whole of this history exactly harmonizes with every other part of the Sacred Record. It displays to us the fallen and destitute condition of man—his exposure to temptation—his rapid progress in sin, if left to himself—his immeasurable obligation to God, if restored and saved—and, finally, the unchangeable character of God as a hater even of that sin which he may ultimately pardon.

SERMON XIX.

ON THE GRADUAL PROGRESS OF EVIL.

James iii. 5.

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

THE design of the proverbial expression which the Apostle here uses, is to intimate the importance of little things, which are apt to be despised and neglected, as being of little or no consequence; whereas, in the end, they are productive of the greatest effects. It is a great point of wisdom to know how to estimate little things. Of those which are evidently great, every one can see the importance: but true wisdom looks at these great objects before they have arrived at their full size. She considers, that it is principally in this earlier state that they come under the power of man, and can be arranged, modified, increased, or extinguished at his pleasure; whereas, in a more advanced stage, they set at defiance all his efforts. On the contrary, it is the part of folly to wait till evils have attained their maturity before they are attacked; for then, that which might at first have been easily crushed, becomes irresistible.

Behold a conflagration! With what dreadful fury it rages! The largest houses are devoured by it in a moment! The strongest fall victims to its uncontrollable power! Yet this fire, which now resists the united wisdom and power of man, originated from a small spark, and might at first have been extinguished by a child.

Look also at yonder tree, which is now so firmly rooted in the earth, which rears its lofty head so high, and bears its flourishing honours so thick upon it! It was once only a small seed; it was then a tender plant, so slender and so weak that the foot of accident might have crushed it, the overshadowing of a weed might have suffocated it, or the hand of negligence or wantonness have torn it up. Thus does Nature point out to us the growth of the strongest things from weak and almost imperceptible beginnings.

Behold also the traveller! He is at a long distance from the end of his journey. A step seems to be of no consequence to him. For what is a step, compared with the many miles which he has to travel? But it is by these successive steps he is carried on, till at last he arrives at his desired home. Mountains, vallies, and plains, the prospect of which even fatigues the eye, are all at length surmounted by the constant application of those little steps which appear at first to bear no proportion to the immeasurable distance.

Such a stress does the established order of nature teach us to lay upon little things. And if we look into the moral world, we shall find that they are not there to be considered as of less importance.

Behold an abandoned and hardened murderer, who is about to receive from the hands of public justice the ignominious punishment due to his crimes! You survey with astonishment and terror his vices; you are shocked while you consider his daring profligacy, his furious passions, his avowed defiance of God and man, his hardness of heart, and his universal depravity. Would you know by what means he arrived at such a dreadful pitch of sin? It was one little step taken after

another, which brought him to it. He began with neglecting the worship of God, proceeded to breaking the Sabbath, resisted the remonstrances of conscience, indulged his passions without controul to gratify them, he pillered and stole: one act led on to another: one crime prepared the way to another: till at length he became such a monster of criminality, that it was no longer consistent with the safety of mankind that he should be permitted to live. But would you know what was the seed which produced this evil fruit; what was the principle which uniformly operated upon him, and induced him to risk the loss of his wealth, his reputation, and his life: it was this, the desire of present gratification. Yes, it was this, which is thought of no consequence by almost all mankind: which is even cherished by many as the chief source of pleasure: which, when it once prevails and overcomes the bounds of reason and religion, produces those dreadful effects that leave no hope of amendment, and almost necessarily terminate in irresistible ruin. Behold how great a matter a small fire kindleth!

Contemplate also the unhappy woman whose licentious conduct has banished her from the society of her own sex, and whose scandalous profligacy and shameless impudence make her shunned by all but the most worthless of the other. In her countenance and conduct appears not so much as a single trace of the amiable graces which should characterize her sex. See her brought to a state of sin, which excites disgust even in the wicked: and to a state of misery, shame, poverty, and ruin, which shock even the hardest heart! To what shall we attribute this dreadful accumulation of crime and wretchedness? What powerful cause has produced it? Perhaps it may have been one, the evil of which is little suspected. It is, indeed, a small spark which kindleth such a fire. It may have been only the love of admiration. That vanity which is seldom considered as any crime, which is even cherished while it does not become immoderate, as being in some

respects pleasing; that vanity which teaches the arts of captivating, which studies the effects of dress, and is employed in adorning and decking the person; that vanity is the author of this wide-extended ruin. It is the little seed from which it has grown and arrived to such dreadful luxuriance. It is true, it does not always produce such deplorable effects; but we are to consider its tendency, if it were not restrained and counteracted as it is generally is. The fear of shame, the opposition of better principles, the authority of those who are revered or dreaded, the clashing of self-interest or evil passions, or the wholesome discipline of adversity, check in many cases its luxuriance, and stifle its growth: so that its proper tendency and effect are not discerned. Still the eye of Wisdom, and the light of Religion discover them, and shew all the evils which afterwards may appear, if circumstances are favourable to their growth; which are already contained in it, and, if suffered to expand, will presently shoot forth and bear fruit.

Many useful remarks will present themselves to the reflecting mind upon this subject; some of which I shall venture to set before you, being assured that they are of considerable importance, as they relate to our conduct as men and as Christians.

1. Let me remark, then, that *evil passions, in their early stage, do not wear the disgusting appearance which they afterwards do when they are carried to excess.* The buds even of the most noxious weeds appear pretty. The most savage animals, while yet young, only amuse us with their gambols as they lie in ambush for their prey or spring upon it. But however harmless their mirth may then be, it is easy to perceive in it the spirit which by and by will tear to pieces, with fury, the quivering victim. Pride and vanity, self-will and anger, lust and deceit, all of them when yet in their infant state, exerting themselves only upon trifles and doing no material injury,—appear to have something pleasing in the eyes of the world, and, instead of being conceal-

ed, are often brought forward in order to produce admiration. Thus will unthinking parents often laugh at the vanity of their children, and please them, and amuse themselves by gratifying it. But, in the eye of a true Christian, every vice is still sinful, and ought to be checked. He considers its principle, which is equally corrupt whatever the fruits of it may be. He does not judge by the effects it has yet produced, but by those which it has a tendency to produce when it meets with no interruption; and he considers the principle as often the more dangerous, because it is not yet attended with any effects that are strikingly bad—is then less suspected, and likely, therefore, to be less resisted.

2. I observe further, that *the foundation of all great vices is laid in those little things which often are scarcely noticed, or scarcely appear to need correction.*—It is by little things that habits are formed and principles become established. They may be considered as little in one sense, as producing immediately no very extensive mischief; but they are by no means little, if we consider the effect they have in producing the general habit, and in establishing those principles which lead to the worst consequences. Little things may be considered as indications of a bad habit and corrupt principles; and in this view, they are by no means unimportant. They resemble the spots or eruptions which sometimes appear in the human body, which are of no material importance in themselves, but are of great consequence when they are considered as indicating a general unsoundness of constitution. It should be remembered, that principle is as truly sacrificed by little offences as by great ones.

3. I remark also, that *little sins are the steps by which we travel on to greater acts of transgression*—No one becomes extremely wicked at once. This would be as unnatural as it would be to travel a great distance without a number of intermediate steps. The gradations of sin are innumerable and almost imperceptible. Now temptation has, in general, but little

force, except when it solicits to those sins which have often been committed, or which are but a single degree beyond what we have been accustomed to commit. And thus persons are brought, not suddenly, but gradually and imperceptibly, to practices and principles which would once have astonished and shocked them.

4. It follows therefore, that *little sins are what, most of all, ought to be attended to and resisted.*— Watch against the beginnings. The spark may soon be extinguished, but the conflagration rages with irresistible fury. The first channel by which confined waters run over their banks may soon be stopped; but by and by it becomes a torrent which tears down the mounds, and spreads itself with desolating fury. Here therefore religion will most successfully operate, in restraining at first, in preventing, in checking the evil disposition as soon as it arises; in watching against those little sins by which corrupt principles and corrupt dispositions are chiefly gratified and nourished. Here also religion chiefly employs itself. Morality and the laws of men restrain from the commission of gross vices: on these accounts, a man will not steal or murder: but true grace discovers itself in opposing not those evils only, but all kinds of coveting, all kinds of hatred. It is the heart which true grace rectifies. It begins with cleansing and purifying the principles of action and the fountain whence all good or evil proceeds. The real Christian considers himself as bound to serve God with his spirit. A clean heart and a new spirit he seeks to obtain. He cannot be contented with a practice which, according to the usual standard of the world is considered as blameless while it permits worldliness of heart, love of filthy lucre, a desire of the applause of men, and a prevailing habit of self-indulgence. True grace discovers itself in resisting these, which are the parents and nurses of other sins. The Scripture says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do thereafter.” Now this wisdom and

Good understanding are very much displayed in observing and checking these common, and, as they are too often termed, little offences, which escape the notice and censure of others, though they are in truth only the issue of the most corrupt part of a most corrupt nature. It is the excellence of God's law, that it is so spiritual as to admit of none of these. Human laws meddle only with the pernicious effects of evil principles; but the law of God goes to the principle itself, and requires that to be mortified and annihilated. It admits of no composition with it. It charges with guilt that vanity which gratifies itself by the superior manner in which it has displayed some trifling accomplishment, and that pride which is even thought decent and respectable. These before God it accounts the symptoms of corruption and depravity. That emulation, which with many is the only source of energy, and which has been too inadvertently encouraged, it condemns as a work of the flesh, the offspring of false views, base ends, and corrupt motives. That inordinate desire of pleasing, which is often thought an essential part of the accomplishments of education, it censures as an undue preference of man to God, and frequently the cause of a sacrifice of truth to the prejudices and vices of men. That self will, which wears the honourable guise of freedom and independence, it condemns as often originating in a proud spirit which can brook no controul, and which is impatient of submission. In these and in many other such things, pointed out by the word of God to be sinful, and evidently originating, when traced up to their source, in a selfish gratification of the corrupt appetites of the flesh, the Christian sees and laments the depravity of his nature. In resisting these consists a great part of his employment. Here is his self-denial exercised. Here is the true spiritual warfare experienced,—the flesh against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. He says not of those transgressions which are passed over by the rest of the world without notice, that they are little sins or trifles:

but he looks upon them as serious indications of a corrupt nature, which must be renewed; as cherishing and encouraging that corrupt nature, and strengthening its strength; and as leading on and habituating the mind to still greater and greater degrees of guilt and corruption. There is not a vice which is so destructive and odious as to be beheld with universal abhorrence but we may trace in ourselves the seeds of it, or even the plant growing up; and it is the business of religion to eradicate it, before it is advanced to its full size and strength.

5. *This subject presents useful lessons of instruction to parents.*—They form the minds of their children. And, it is too much to be feared, that many of those unhappy persons who have been brought to ruin, have been brought to it chiefly by the operation of those very principles which their parents instilled into them and encouraged. From them, perhaps, they imbibed the love of dress and the desire of admiration. Their parents nursed and fostered their infant vanity. From their parents they received the habits of indulgence which led them to consider wholesome restraint as an intolerable evil. By them they were encouraged to display their childish wit at the expense of the follies or infirmities of their neighbours, and taught to cultivate an uncharitable or deceitful disposition. The parents added fuel to their dawning resentments, adopted their trivial quarrels, and thus taught them malice and revenge. From their parents they imbibed the love of money; and by them were taught to value others, not according to their real excellence, but according to their wealth and the advantages to be expected from them. From their parents they learned to make no account of religion, and to consider the Bible as a dull, useless, or a dangerous work. And can parents be surprised, if, after the pains they have thus taken to implant and to cherish evil principles in their children; can they be surprised, if they reap the fruits of it themselves? Can they be surprised, if by and by they see

their children immersed in pleasure and sensuality, profligate and licentious, influenced by no good principles, or mainly instigated by the spirit of gain? Can they wonder if they find their children disobedient and irreverent to themselves, and injurious and cruel to others? Can they wonder if they see them live disliked and die unpitied? Surely these are but the consequences which might be expected from such an education. It was formed upon a plan which tended to cherish and cultivate vice; and the pains taken could not be expected to be otherwise than productive in a soil which is of itself so fruitful of evil, that we see the wisest and most judicious methods of instruction and the most pious education not always able to eradicate it.

6. *The consideration of the subject of my discourse should lead us also to deep humiliation on account of our great corruption, and to earnest prayers for the grace of Christ to pardon and to cleanse us.*—Persons who have superficial views of their duty, and low apprehensions of the evil of sin, are ready to look upon themselves as tolerably moral, while they are free from gross vices: and therefore they regard themselves as needing no repentance but what is occasional, no habitual watchfulness, no constant prayer, no daily endeavours to obtain the grace of God. But let those little sins which are every hour committed; those seeds of vice which are continually springing up in the heart, those ebullitions of a corrupt fountain from which the life is never free, be taken into the account, and we shall perceive the need we have to be earnest in our prayers to be sanctified and to be pardoned. Alas! when nothing appears wrong to the superficial observer, all may be wrong within. The state of the heart, the general system, may be totally wrong and corrupt. Every principle of action may be polluted. The fear of man, the love of applause, the desire of self-indulgence, the thirst of lucre, may be the springs and the only springs of action. One may succeed another.

occupy the whole heart, and influence the whole conduct, without its being directed for one hour by the pure principle of love to God, or real benevolence to man. Here in the heart is the lamentable power of corruption seen! Here we have need to be cleansed! The tree must be made good, before good fruit can be expected: the fountain must be made sweet, before its waters can be so. Here, therefore, we must begin. We must pray to God to give us a new heart. We must be engrafted into Christ Jesus the living vine; and, by union to him receive a new power to bring forth new fruit.

7. *And as we see evil arrive at its perfection by small gradations, so let us remember that good advances in the same manner.*—We should not despise little things, either in what is good or bad; for, as the apocryphal writer observes, “he that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little.” The character is formed very much from the repetition of little acts: and a progress in religion is made by small successive steps, none of which ought to be despised. And be not discontented, because you cannot at once arrive at those things which are most excellent. To attempt too great a height at once often tends to discouragement. Try to do a little, and that little will prepare you for more. Take the first step, and that will prepare the way for a second. Use the same rules of prudence in religion which you find useful in the ordinary affairs of life. In this respect imitate the children of the world, who are often wiser in their generation than the children of light. Above all, seek to obtain that holy principle which respects God, and which acts out of love to his name and gratitude to him for his goodness. This will rectify the whole of your conduct, and each successive step you will then take will lead you nearer and nearer to Him who is the Source of all good.

SERMON XX.

THE NATURE AND VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE.

Psalm lxxxix. 47.

Remember how short my time is. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?

THE Psalmist composed the psalm of which the words just read are a part, under very great depression of mind. Disappointed in hopes which appeared to be founded on the promises of God, and reduced to a state of the lowest misery and distress, he surveys, as was natural, the miseries of human life, and considers its shortness and its vanity. Impatient of the sufferings allotted to him, he at length breaks out into the prayer of my text, "How long, Lord, wilt thou hide thyself? For ever? Shall thy wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?" "Oh spare the rod of thine anger! Consider how short my life is, even at the longest; how much more so under thy punishment! For we consume away in thine anger, and perish under thy wrathful displeasure. Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain, as they appear to be, if their life, vain and short as it is, is still to be abridged

and rendered more miserable by thy severe chastisements?"

The affections upon which such an address is founded, are very natural to a person in the situation of the Psalmist. It is not to be wondered at if he should see every object through a gloomy medium, and, beholding the shortness of life and the vanity of it, should be ready to conclude that all men were made "in vain," or "for nought" as it is rendered in the old translation.

In another point of view, however, short as human life is, it does not appear to be in vain. On the contrary, the most important purposes may be answered by it. We shall therefore divide this discourse into two parts, correspondent to these two different views of the value of the life of man.

I. If we consider life, then, as it is in itself, and form our estimate of its value only by the degree of temporal enjoyment it is capable of affording, it will appear to be very vain indeed; and man will almost seem to be made for nothing.

1. Consider how *short* life is!—It is represented in Scripture by every image which can denote things fugitive and transitory. It is a dream; as a watch in the night; as a shadow that departeth; as grass which in the morning groweth up and is green, and in the evening is cut down, dried up and withereth. All that is certain of life is what is already past. And how short does that part of it appear! Ten or twenty years, when we look forward to them, appear to be of long duration: but when we review them as already spent, every mind is struck with the justice of the reflection, how soon are they gone! And at the end of the longest life, long as it may appear to the young and thoughtless, yet the man of fourscore years, who from experience knows how to make a better estimate of its duration, will tell you, that to him it appeareth only as yesterday that is past.

2. Consider its *uncertainty*.—Short as the period of life is when extended to its natural termination, how often do we see that period shortened, perhaps fatally; broken suddenly, without warning, in the midst of apparent health and strength, which promised the continuance of many years! Thus man dies, and his expectations perish. His schemes and plans for the successful completion of which years were still wanting, as years had already been spent in promoting them, are all cut off in a moment; cut off as it were by accident, and not through any want of prudence or attention on his part; without any regard to the useful or beneficent designs which he was employed in advancing. Alas! how little does death consider our plans! The deep-laid schemes of villainy, or the righteous purposes of the just; the enjoyment of long-sought pleasure just within the reach, and the honest endeavour to provide for a numerous and indigent family, are, with equal abruptness, broken off and forever terminated by his resistless stroke. Who can say of any project that he has formed, that he shall accomplish it? Who can say, to-morrow I will do this, or will go there? For who knoweth what to-morrow may bring forth?

3. Survey also the *sufferings* to which life is exposed in this short existence. Take notice of the natural calamities which belong to man; the diseases of which the seeds are sown in his frame; the various accidents to which he is liable, and from which no prudence or foresight can exempt him. Look at the history of man, and see what he suffers from his own species. Observe the dreadful effects of wars and the barbarous desolations of which we read in history. Recollect what cruel tyrants there have been in the world, who have been permitted to sport, as it were, with the pangs of their fellow-creatures. Think how many have been undone by unjust laws, judges, or witnesses; what terrible proscriptions and cruel persecutions have wasted mankind. Indeed, the history of the world is little else than the history of a series of distressing and

cruel events; and a very large part of it, however things may be palliated and gilded over, can scarcely be read by a benevolent man without astonishment and horror. In short, what spectacles of misery present themselves every where to the eye, which, if this life be the whole of existence, force us to say, Why hast thou made all men in vain!

4. Look also at the *business* of life, the very end for which most men live, and the same reflection will forcibly recur.—I say nothing of the labour and discipline which are necessary in order to form us for active life, the difficulty with which proper employments and stations are obtained, the hardships we may have to encounter, the frauds practised upon us, the risks we run, and the disappointments we meet with even in the pursuit of a bare subsistence. Of these I say nothing, though in truth they are felt very acutely: years of labour and exertion, of prudence and forethought, cannot be utterly lost, as they often are, without the most painful emotions.

But what is the business of life in itself? What is the end for which so much toil is endured, so many cares and anxieties suffered? Simply this: to go on suffering the same anxieties and cares, and enduring the same toil. How great a part of mankind is doomed to labour hard, in order to gain by the sweat of their brow—what? Merely provision, in order that life may go on, and the same round may be continued. And even those in more affluent circumstances; those whose labours have been successful, and who have acquired all that their hopes could aspire to, what have they obtained? Still their one great object is to carry on life: to continue the enjoyment of health; to guard against its decays; to refresh the body with rest and with food, that existence may be prolonged in the same unvarying round. And may it not be asked, is this all? Is the repetition, year after year—the same succession of food, and rest, and solicitude and vanity, and short and mixed pleasures, and hopes, and disappointments:—is this life?

How many possessed of all the advantages which fortune could give them, yet weary of them all, have exclaimed, Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain!

II. Such reflections as these naturally occur to every person who sits down to survey human life, and to compute the sum of its value. He will consider the large proportion of time in childhood and youth necessary to prepare us for life, the amount of what is consumed in taking the rest and food which our bodies require, the quantity employed in procuring necessary subsistence and the conveniencies and accommodations of life; and after all these are reckoned up, these means of living, rather than life itself, how little of it remains! What a shadow is life! Lord, wherefore hast thou made all men for nought?

But however obvious such a view of life may be, and however natural such reflections upon it, that view is imperfect and those reflections unjust. However naturally that view of it upon which such reflections are founded, may present itself to those who esteem the enjoyments of this life as their only hope, and who have met with disappointments in it, it is nevertheless partial and defective. Let us look at life in another point of view; let us consider it as giving us an opportunity of doing the will of God; let us take it in connexion with a future state; let us associate it with the redemption effected by our blessed Saviour; and then life, short as it is, and uncertain as it is, will acquire a new value, and we shall see that God has not made man in vain.

1. He has not made all men in vain, if we consider the value of doing the will of God.—What is life? Is it merely eating and drinking, and enjoying sensual pleasures? Is that to be called life in man which he shares in common with the brute beasts that perish? Do we so forget our dignity? Why have we an immortal soul capable of knowing God and serving him? Here then an important view of life opens itself to us. We live not to eat, and to drink, and to labour; but we eat and

drink, and labour, in order to live; that is, to fulfil the will of our great Creator and to glorify his name. Now this is done when his will is made the chief rule of our lives, and his glory the end of our actions; when we exercise dispositions proper to our stations in life and agreeable to the duties we owe to him. In this light the events of life are comparatively of little importance: it is the duties they call forth which are really so. In this light it is indifferent whether a man be rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate in life. These are only circumstances; these are trials to call forth the exercise of proper dispositions. These are only means to produce an end, and that end is to honour and glorify God by resignation and trust in adverse circumstances; by humility and thankfulness in prosperity; by a diligent discharge of those duties which God has ordained in every situation and station in life. In this view, life is not to be regarded as given in vain, because we meet with hardships and disappointments: let the great object of life be to serve God, and these hardships become only secondary considerations, such as are indeed of little moment compared with the great end of life.

This, my brethren, we must own, is a just view of the subject, when we consider it in connexion with the powers and capacities which God has given us. But are we acting according to this view? To what, then, are our desires and hopes chiefly directed? To the attainment of the things of this life? To procure all the means for carrying on life with more comfort, and less inconvenience, and less danger of suffering? Alas! besides that this is a vain expectation which we cannot realize, we are mistaking the very end of life, we are wrong in the very foundation on which we build. What else would a brute beast, that perishes, desire? No: propose to yourself another end of life, an end unconnected with circumstances and events which it is not in your power to control; propose to yourself the fulfilment of God's will; study that

will; let it be your object to do it: and then there will be no reason to complain that God has made his creatures in vain.

2. Consider also human life in reference to a *future state*, and its importance will rise upon us.—If, indeed, God had terminated our existence with the present life, we might have been ready to exclaim, Wherefore has God made man in vain! But when we carry our view forward to that eternal state of which this life is but the beginning, and in comparison of which it is but a moment; when we reflect that the soul which quits the dying body, and the body dissolved into corruption, shall again be united and shall live forever and ever in a new state; when we consider that this eternal life will be either miserable or happy according to the manner in which we spend our short existence here; surely this life is not in vain: it becomes of infinite importance,—an importance proportioned to that infinite happiness or woe with which it is necessarily connected.

Alas! how short sighted is man! How blind to points of the first importance! How eagerly are all his thoughts, his hopes, and fears engaged in forming plans and contriving schemes for the enjoyment of to-morrow, or of the next year, or of the next fifty years! It matters not which we take: they are all expressions of the same meaning; they are all equally as a moment of time with respect to eternity. But, alas! what folly is it that with such care about the body which is dying, the world which is perishing before our eyes, time which is perpetually disappearing, we should so little care about that eternal state in which we are to live for ever, when this dream is over! When we shall have existed ten thousand years in another world, where will be all the cares and fears and enjoyments of this? In what light then shall we look upon the things which now transport us with joy, or overwhelm us with grief? What trifles will they all appear! And now they appear comparatively trifles to the mind which duly contemplates and realizes eternity.

Eternity! Awful word; at the sound of which we awake as out of sleep! Eternity! Before its view, how do the councils of princes, the plots of ambition, the revolutions of states, and the fates of empires, shrink into nothing! Ye immortal souls whom I address upon the most important subject, ponder, I pray you, upon that eternal state to which you are swiftly carried by the flood of time! You see your fellow creatures around you dying; you take a hasty glance at the shifting scenes around you, the harmony and end of which you see not; you ask why was man made in vain; why does he come into life only to be dissolved again? Alas! you mistake; you see man going out at the gate of death, but you see not the extent of country behind. All the busy tribes of men whose memorial has long perished here; these all are living in another state, whose happiness and misery, objects and attainments, are upon a scale infinitely greater than all the things of this transitory life. And is it so, indeed, that your happiness in that state depends upon your life here? Who, then, can speak in terms of sufficient emphasis of the value of this life? Awake thou that sleepest! Awake thou that dreamest of days and years; awake to contemplate ages! Thou that lookest at a family, a sect, a tribe, survey-assembled worlds! Thou that art oppressed with the pains and aches and weakness of a vile body, behold a spiritual body pure and free from infirmity! Thou that buryest all thy hopes in the earth upon which thy foot treadeth, see what a state of immortality and glory remains after this earth is burned up, and the elements have been dissolved with fervent heart! Oh, look to that state; let all your hopes centre in attaining a happiness which only then begins to exist, when all the schemes of worldly greatness and worldly bliss are extinguished, to live no more!

3. Survey human life also in connexion with *the work of Redemption*, and we shall find that man is not made for nought.—Are the days of our pilgrimage here few and evil; and does the life of man seem to be only

a mixture of vanity and vexation? Yet see how the glory of Christ the Redeemer, and of God through him are connected with it. What a value is stamped upon life; what dignity upon the world, when we behold the only Son of God taking upon him that life, and coming into that world! Are men made in vain, when the only-begotten of the Father gave his life as a ransom for theirs? Here indeed we see the honour of man: he may become one with Christ, and Christ with him. Much as his life is chequered with vicissitudes, degraded by meanness, defiled by pollution, burdened with cares, oppressed with sorrow, and abridged by death: it is more than ennobled by the solicitude which the Almighty has expressed for it; by the bounty of Heaven, which daily ministers to its necessities; by the love of Christ, who gave his own life a ransom for sinners; by the offices he undertakes in behalf of those who make application to him; by the means of grace provided for the benefit of their souls; by the promises of the Gospel held out to them; and by the influences of the Holy Ghost shed abroad in their hearts. Is man, then, made in vain who has the Spirit of God for his Guide, the Son of God for his Redeemer, the Almighty for his Father, the Gospel for his support, and heaven for his home? No: he is blessed and favoured indeed. He is honoured with privileges and blessings resembling those of angels. But what am I saying? Are men in general so honoured? Alas! with respect to many, we must still say, Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain? But in what state are we, my brethren? Is it our care to be found united to Christ by a living and true faith? Is it the great employment of our lives to be partakers of that grace and peace which he communicates? Have we renounced the world, with its pomps and vanities? Do we say in our hearts, away with its glittering, perishing follies; I seek more substantial blessings; I have an immortal soul, I seek its salvation; I am a sinner, and I labour to be delivered from my sins; I want to enjoy communion with God

my Creator, and to be made meet for a better world above? If such are our hopes and desires, we are really living to great ends; we are enjoying life in the only sense in which it deserves that name. Without this we have still to learn the very end for which life was given to man; for which he was created and placed in the world.

Lastly, is life of so much importance, and yet is *it short also?* What an additional value does it acquire even from this circumstance which seems at first sight to diminish its worth! In this view, a day, an hour, is of great importance. If life is *so uncertain*; if almost the only thing certain in life is that we shall die, and we know not how soon; what manner of persons ought we to be?—Are we laying this to heart? Do we say to ourselves, “Life is too important to be trifled with; too valuable to be wasted in things which have no importance beyond the present period? I have a great work to do, and little time in which to perform it. Death is at hand; the Judge is at the door. Oh, let me improve the precious though fleeting moments! They may be improved so as to make me partaker of the favour of God, and of eternal happiness.” Short as life is, it is long enough to answer this purpose; and when it has done this, it matters not how soon it is terminated. It will be continued to greater advantage in another state. Happy is the person who acts under these views. They are the views which Christianity gives of this world and this life. May it so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!

SERMON XXI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF PILGRIMAGE ON EARTH.

Hebrews xi. 13.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

IT must be allowed, that the Patriarchs and other members of the Jewish Church, before the Christian æra, did not enjoy so clear and distinct a view of the nature and blessedness of the life to come as we do: for it was Christ who was to bring life and immortality to light. But, on the other hand, it is evident, that the dispensations of God with many of them were such as tended to give them just views of the vanity and emptiness of this world, and to teach them to desire earnestly that happier state of future existence which was but obscurely revealed to them. Of this we have a striking proof in the course of life which God appointed for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They had been called out of idolatry, as one chosen family to whom God manifested himself with peculiar favour. They

therefore eminently appeared as a light shining in the midst of the general darkness which overspread the rest of the world; and their posterity of the Jewish Church, who received their most distinguished privileges through them, and on their account, would naturally look up to them, and to every circumstance of their lives, with peculiar attention and reverence. To what course of life, then, did God call their father Abraham, his chosen servant? Was it to a life of ease, comfort and enjoyment? Did he choose for him the most delightful country, subject it to his dominion, and on his account bless it with double fertility? No: Abraham had no land assigned to him, or country which he could call his own. So far different was his lot that he was commanded to quit forever his native land, his house, his family, his connexions, his countrymen; and to wander about in a strange land, dwelling in tents without a fixed or certain habitation. Surely the moral to be learned from this appointment of Providence could not be obscure. It was evidently the design of the Almighty that it should forever impress on the hearts of his people a persuasion, that it was not in this world that they were to seek their happiness; since Abraham, the friend of God, and the distinguished heir of his blessing, had not found it a place of enjoyment:—but that, sitting loose to this life and all its comforts, as well as all its cares, they were to look forward to another state in which the effects of the Divine favour would be more eminently conspicuous. Had there been no blessings but those of a temporal kind, surely the Canaanites among whom Abraham sojourned, had been happier than the venerable Patriarch favoured by God himself. They had houses and lands, cities and towns, a country and a people. Abraham had none of these. The conclusion is evident. He could not but “look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God;” for he that so lives confesses that he is a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth, and declares plainly that he seeks “a country. And truly, if he had been mind-

ful of that country from whence he came out," if he had thought it so desirable a thing to have the blessings of this life, "he might have had opportunity to return; but now he desires a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called his God, for he hath prepared for him a city."

But did not God *afterwards* give the *descendants* of Abraham a country,—a land flowing with milk and honey, and abounding in cities, high and fenced up to heaven? It is true—he did; but he had first installed the principle, and given the rule, according to which they were to enjoy it. He had trained them to consider all worldly possessions as worthless, when compared with the blessings of heaven. Thus they were taught to enjoy as those that enjoyed not; and still to consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims upon earth.

What God teaches to one man he teaches to all. Truth is not to be confined to an individual or to a tribe, it belongs to the universe, and is applicable to all mankind; and when God imparts it in a remarkable manner to any particular person, it is that by his means it may be communicated to many. It was not Abraham therefore, merely, or Isaac, or the Jews that were to consider themselves as strangers and pilgrims here; but all mankind, and especially all Christians. The whole tenor of the Gospel illustrates and confirms this lesson, and impresses it with still more force than even the former dispensation. The address of the Gospel is this:—"Ye are pilgrims and strangers in this world: ye are not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth; for" (to put it in a still stronger light, to use an image still more forcible) "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

It is of unspeakable importance to have a practical conviction of this truth. If we have not a just view of the nature of this life, we shall be fundamentally wrong; we shall be wrong, not merely in an immaterial or in a collateral point, but in the very principle from which

we act. To have a right knowledge of this life, is as necessary as to know ourselves or to know God.

Let us, then, consider in what respects the image of our being pilgrims and strangers here applies, and what tempers and dispositions it supposes us to possess.

The Christian is a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, because he is not at home there; has not there taken up his rest; has not obtained there that state of established happiness which alone can satisfy his soul. It is not there that he even desires or seeks his happiness: he is merely passing through the world; his home is in another country, a land afar off, a land glorious and infinitely preferable to this;—there his heart is, there is the rest he earnestly desires; there are concentrated all his hopes of happiness; onward, therefore, he travels; and though sometimes weary with many a painful step through rough and toilsome ways, yet he is revived by the thought of being continually nearer home, and that thought supports him in the tedious journey. When the traveller meets with beautiful prospects, verdant meads, cooling streams, delicious fruits, and hospitable entertainment, they cheer and gladden his progress: he enjoys them as refreshments by the way; but they do not tempt him to loiter, or to forget that he is still far from home. He surveys the countries through which he passes; he observes their manners, he mingles in society with their inhabitants, but still he is not at home: he still feels himself a stranger, whose chief business it is to prosecute his journey through these foreign countries, until he arrives at his own.

Such too, in a general point of view, is the state of the Christian pilgrim. Let us enter more particularly into it, and consider the dispositions and views which, as a pilgrim and a stranger, he is supposed to possess.—He is supposed, then, to have heaven in view, as his *home*. A man's own home is to be considered as the place which, above all others, he values and loves. It is true that other countries may be more beautiful,

other houses more convenient and splendid; but the laudable attachment to home, which seems implanted by nature in our hearts, is apt to overbalance every recommendation to which other dwellings can lay claim. Home is the spot where the social feelings reside, where all that is dear and sacred seems to be centred; the secure and peaceful asylum where happiness herself seems to fix her favourite habitation. And in this sense should Heaven be the Christian's home. It is to be supposed, therefore, that he knows it well; that he is well acquainted with all its advantages; that he is familiar with the various and exquisite scenes of enjoyment it affords; that it is suited to all his ideas of happiness, and that therefore he looks towards it with longing expectation to be there, as the traveller who, having ascended the summit of some high mountain, and surveyed the extensive prospect around him, fixes his eye upon that point of the horizon where lies his beloved home, and gazes upon it with such intenseness as almost to persuade himself that he perceives the well known spot to which he hastens.

In this respect, however, it is to be feared, that the greater part of nominal Christians are exceedingly defective. With them, too often, heaven is not a home. They hope, indeed, that when they die they shall go to heaven, because they believe that it is a place of great happiness, but still, were it left to themselves to choose when they would go there, it would be very long before they went. Were it left to them to choose their seat of happiness, it would not be heaven. They have already a home here; and they value heaven as a kind of representation of that home—lovely on account of its similitude to it, and because every thing which embitters that home will in heaven be removed.

Not so with the real Christian, who is a pilgrim and a stranger here; he dwells, fondly dwells, upon the contemplation of heaven as his true home; and he values it, not on account of its likeness to this world, but its dissimilarity. There he shall be with God and with Christ:

there he shall possess a pure and holy nature; there he shall no more be overcome by temptations, or have to struggle with a perverse disposition;—there he shall dwell in a land where God is loved and worshipped, with perfect, cheerful, and constant devotion; where there is knowledge without ignorance, truth without error, and enjoyment without sin. These are the particulars which, from being always desired and frequently contemplated, are deeply engraven on his heart, as constituting the happiness of heaven. Without these, he sees there can be no true felicity; and that country, by whatever distance he may be separated from it, is still his home where he hopes to dwell, and to which his fondest desires ever tend.

The idea of our being pilgrims and strangers implies that we are *travelling* towards our home. A stranger, it is true, may sit down and dwell contentedly in a country in which he is an alien; and he may forget his home and native soil; but when the metaphor of a stranger and traveller is used, such a case is not supposed: it implies, on the contrary, that he is active and unwearied, restless and impatient in the prosecution of his journey, being continually spurred on by the desire of arriving at the place on which all his thoughts are fixed.

Justly does this image illustrate the case of a real Christian, his main business, his chief interest in life, is to attain to heaven. He does not leave it to chance whether he shall arrive there or not: he does not contemplate it as a good about which he is indifferent; but he makes it the first object of his solicitude, as it is that of a traveller to return to his home. For this purpose, he consults the Oracles of Truth with earnest attention, to know the way, as a traveller who has to pass through an intricate and unknown country examines the map: he seeks direction from those who have travelled on the same road: he prays earnestly for Divine guidance: he watches with a godly jealousy against every thing which may retard or obstruct his progress:

he is ready to pluck out the right eye, or to cut off the right hand: he esteems not father nor mother, houses or land, in comparison with the salvation of his soul. And as a traveller often feels a gloom when he reflects how far he is yet from home, or is gladdened when he considers that such a space is passed over; as he mourns when unexpected accidents retard his journey, and rejoices when he can pursue it with uninterrupted rapidity: so the Christian at one time reflects with pain that he has been loitering in his course, or has strayed out of the road, or gone backward in his path: but at another is inclined to hope that he has made considerable progress, and is ready to believe the difficulties of the journey almost over. His hopes and fears, however, both rise from the same source: his success and his disappointment contribute to the same end:—all things tend to increase the desire of home, under the influence of which he still travels stedfastly onward.

But, alas! with how many is the case dreadfully the reverse! How many are there who take no steps in the path toward heaven! Well might our Saviour say the way was narrow, and few there be that find it; for if we judge by the ordinary pursuits, and hopes and pleasures, and fears and pains of the Christian world at large, I fear we shall find but few who are evidently travelling towards heaven as their home. The principal aim of a man's life cannot well be concealed from others:—and when we see a prevailing desire to be rich or comfortable or respectable in this world; when we see men anxious mainly upon points which respect these pursuits, and willing to converse upon no other subjects, and to read no books but such as relate to them; when we see them never apparently interested about their souls, never inquiring with solicitude the way to heaven, never afraid lest they should mistake it, never joyful in the hope that they have made a progress in it: when we see all this, surely we cannot do violence to reason so far as to say, that these men look upon heaven as their home, that they are pressing towards it with the impa-

tience of travellers who are hastening to the end of their journey, or that they are using their utmost efforts to have an abundant entrance ministered to them into the celestial kingdom.

The image contained in my text supposes also, that a truly religious person does not *set up his rest* in this life as if he were at home. He does not build his chief hope of felicity upon the possession of the things of time and sense.—The man of this world has no thought of happiness beyond this life. Exclusively devoted to schemes of earthly enjoyment, he encircles himself with friends, amongst whom he spends his hours of leisure: he contrives amusement, and variety in amusements; and if his sun of prosperity shines unclouded, he is at rest, he has all that his heart can wish. So in idea had the rich man in the Parable, who determined to erect larger barns, and to multiply his stores. But alas! he who builds his hopes upon this world builds upon the sand. He who expects what God has declared to be hopeless must be disappointed. God has pronounced a curse upon the earth, and upon the man who looks to it for happiness; and foolish is he who thinks to evade that sentence. Instead of his being able to say, “Soul, take thine ease,” behold the reverse which frequently takes place! Friends are removed, neighbours are contentious, children become disobedient, splendour palls upon the sight, amusement becomes insipid, losses and disappointments succeed, health decays, passions corrode the mind, diseases and pains torment the frame; and the boasted Babel of human bliss crumbles into pieces, leaving only a melancholy ruin as the monument of the folly of the projector.

Not so with the real Christian—he confesses himself a pilgrim and stranger here below, and therefore does not build on this world his principal hope. I say, his *principal* hope—for he does not *refuse* the rest, and peace, and other temporal blessings which God has provided for him. He receives them with thanksgiving

and gratitude to Him who gave them. But then he does not desire them as his portion. He continually looks beyond them. He travels on to heaven amidst a country smiling with verdure, still valuing his home as dearly, as if the scene around him were barren, and the road rough and painful.

The same principle also leads him rightly to estimate the disappointments and troubles of life. Shock, severe to nature are received by him, though not without emotion, yet without despair. When he mourns, it is not as one without hope. He has not lost his all when he loses much.

However dreary and toilsome the journey, he refreshes himself by remembering the nearness of his home: with whatever opposition he meets, with whatever difficulties he struggles, under whatever embarrassments he labours, his consolation is still that it is but for a little time; and that he shall soon be at home. "Shall I be dejected," he cries, "because in this journey of a day, the accommodations on the road are defective? Am I to despair, because the inn in which I lodge is uncomfortable? O rather let me hasten on my journey, and pursue my ultimate object with more eagerness: in this I shall suffer no disappointment. In heaven will be all the happiness my soul can desire. Gird thyself, then, O my soul; hold on thy way without being dispirited; yet a little while, and ample amends will be made for every suffering. In the mean time, therefore, let not my faith and my patience fail."

This view of the world also serves to give a just estimate of *death*.—To Christian pilgrims what is death? It is the end of their toilsome journey. They have arrived at home: they have reached their Father's house, and are received like children long expected and greatly desired. Should we repine that the fatigues of the journey are over, that the wearisome way which cost many an hour of suffering is now ended; that its difficulties, its pains, its dangers, are now surmounted? Is it a matter of grief that the weary trav-

eller has entered into the rest he has so long desired; that the end, so long pursued, is attained; that the prayers so often made, are fully answered; that the fears, so often felt, are banished forever; that the hopes, so often the source of comfort, are now lost in a blessed reality? No! Death in this view is not a scene of terror, but the joyful entrance into bliss; not the extinction of all our pleasures, but the happy termination of every sorrow. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; even so, saith the spirit, for they rest from their labours."

To conclude—Much, we see, depends upon the view we entertain of the nature of this life; much of our peace of mind, and still more of our religious progress. Hence, it appears, a worldly mind is far more incompatible with religion than is generally supposed. That it may be an obstacle to piety is commonly admitted; but, in fact, it is much more—it is its absolute destruction. Religion supposes a spirit and temper which cannot consist with a worldly or selfish principle. Hence also we learn the necessity of being principally solicitous for the welfare of our souls. Heaven is a home only to those whose dispositions and views are prepared for it. There must be something heavenly in the state of the temper and inclinations before its enjoyments can be desired. And, above all, there must be a knowledge and love of that blessed Redeemer who has purchased heaven for us, in order to make us meet for it.—Let not the careless and indifferent; let not those who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;" let not the worldly, the selfish, the sensual, flatter themselves that heaven is their home. They deceive themselves, if they think so. They are of this world, and their nature must be renewed after the Divine image, before they can be admitted into that seat of purity and holiness.—Are we then numbered amongst those who are treading in the steps of Christ, following him as our pattern and guide, studying as his subjects, to be conformed to his will, purifying ourselves

even as he is pure? Never, till this is our true state, can we claim a portion with those for whom he has provided mansions of glory in the world above. Seeing that there remaineth a rest for the people of God, and that we have the promise of entering into that rest, let us constantly entertain a holy fear lest any of us should seem to come short of it; for we are made partakers of Christ, if we "hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast to the end."

SERMON XXII.

ON FASTING.

PREACHED ON THE SUNDAY PRECEDING A PUBLIC FAST

2 Chron. xx. 3.

And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

AS there may probably be some persons amongst us, who have never understood the nature of fasting as a religious service, or even seriously inquired into its design and utility, I propose in this discourse to give as plain and full an account of it as I am able; answering, at the same time, the objections which may suggest themselves against its use.

A fast, then, may be defined to be a voluntary abstinence from food, as a token of our humiliation before God. Repentance, it is true, is seated in the heart. There may be deep repentance, where it is not manifested by any outward sign or expression:—and, on the contrary, there may be much of the outward marks of repentance, where there is no inward feeling; no real sorrow for sin, or strong desire to avoid it.

It may here, then, be asked,—“Of what use is this outward sign? If we do not possess the repentance which it signifies, it is an act of mockery before God; and if we do, God who sees our hearts cannot need to be informed of their state by any external expression.”

To this, I answer, in the first place, that if we have no real repentance in our hearts, the outward expression of it is but mockery. It is indisputable that those who are decidedly and manifestly impenitent had better not pretend to fast; for such fasts are an abomination to God. Such were the fasts which were kept by the hypocritical Israelites, and condemned by the Prophets. "Wherefore have we fasted," (they said) "and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold" (it is replied,) "in the day of your fast, ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours." In other words, in those public fasts, in which they went up to the temple with great solemnity and appearance of devotion, they privately at home spent the day in pleasure, and exacted of their servants their usual labour. "Ye fast," it is added, "for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness." Instead of cleansing your hearts, you are indulging thoughts of anger and strife, and devising schemes of injustice and oppression. "Ye shall not fast in this manner, to make your voice to be heard on high," if you would have the Almighty answer you. "Is it such a fast as this that I have chosen? Is it for a man to bow down his head as a bulrush, to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Do I, that is to say, want you merely to cover yourselves with sackcloth, and put ashes on your head; and bow down your heads mechanically, as a bulrush bends before the wind, without any real submission of the heart! "Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord?"—It is evident, that a fast, disgraced by such insincerity, could not be acceptable to a pure and holy God. It was mere hypocrisy, and therefore God says to such corrupt worshippers, "Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination to me: your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them." But would you have your fasts acceptable, then let your practice cor-

respond with your worship:—"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." It is plain, then, that where the heart is not interested, and where sin, so far from being repented of and forsaken, is even cherished on the fast day itself, such fasting is abomination in the sight of God. The case of such persons is clear. They had better not pretend to fast, than fast in such hypocrisy.

But there is a large class of persons of a different description, who may, perhaps unjustly, apply to themselves what is denounced in Scripture against those gross hypocrites: I mean, such persons as secretly acknowledge their sinfulness before God, and would willingly manifest their penitence if not restrained by the fear of ostentation. Now I beg leave to remind such persons, that fasting, like all other external acts of religion, is not appointed merely to show that we are religious, but also to assist in making us so. The great bulk of a congregation which worship God on the Sabbath, consists of persons who acknowledge themselves to be far from being in all respects what they ought to be: but who come to church, both that they may learn their duty, and that they may obtain help of God to practise it. It is sufficient that they are sincere and possess a real desire of amendment in order to justify their worship of God. If none were to enter the house of God but those who are already pious, by what means are others to become so? We attend the ordinances of God in the hope of improvement, as the sick attend a physician. By nature we are all corrupt; and the use of religion is to reclaim us. This, however, is often effected only by slow means: by endeavours frequently faint at first, but becoming, through God's blessing upon the means used, more and more successful. We worship God, not as angels, but as sinful men; not so much to glorify him, as that we may be improved and

saved ourselves. Now this being the case with the bulk of mankind, how ought they to act with respect to fasting? Doubtless exactly in the same manner as with respect to the other appointed modes of worship. They should consider it as an institution calculated to be highly useful to them, if they employ it properly; and therefore it is their duty, and ought to be their business, thus to employ it. Now I would ask such persons, have you no sins to answer for? Have you not incurred God's displeasure? Ought you not to live in a much holier manner than you do? If your consciences answer, as I doubt not they will, in the affirmative; then why should you not humble yourselves before God? Here is an opportunity offered you of so doing. Here is a day set apart, on which it is not merely convenient to fast, but on which it is your absolute and solemn duty to humble yourselves. Why, then, should you not embrace this opportunity of acknowledging your sinfulness, and imploring God's pardon and blessing? If you still say, it will appear ostentatious; I answer, that if you alone were to keep the fast, it might wear the appearance of ostentation: therefore; in such a case, the rule ought to be most strictly observed, "Thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head," instead of covering it with ashes, as was usual on such occasions, "that thou appear not to men to fast." All ostentation is odious and criminal. But, on the contrary, in the case of public fasting, it becomes a duty, not only really to fast, but to show openly your compliance with a prescribed service, and gladly to embrace the opportunity of humbling yourselves before God; and if you still feel a reluctance to comply with this ordinance, examine your hearts, to discover whence this reluctance springs. Is it not your duty to humble yourselves before God? Then, why do you not perform it? Or what good reason can you give for neglecting it? May there not be other and more questionable motives mixed with your dread of ostentation? To say nothing of more serious causes of unwillingness; causes which go to bring into

suspicion the very existence of religion in the heart; may it not be, that you are unduly afraid of appearing singular, that you shrink from the ridicule which may be awakened by this open profession of religion? It undoubtedly requires some degree of fortitude to avow a determination to be religious; and, in many cases, the fear of shame acts where we least suspect it.

But again it may be urged *“If we feel repentance in our hearts, God, who sees our hearts, does not require to be informed of it by any external expression.”*—No; but the same may be affirmed of prayer, Why should we pray? God knows our wants and does not need that we should formally state them to him. The same also may be said of all the means of grace which God has appointed. If our hearts are right with God, what occasion is there for using them; and if they are not, what benefit can arise from their use? All such reasoning proves too much. It is founded upon a false view of human nature, and of the means by which God changes and rectifies the heart. God, it is true, could infuse grace into the heart; could make us angels in a moment; but it is not his will so to do. He appoints certain means to that end; the efficacy of which, if they are diligently and devoutly used, is certain, though often gradual and slow. Admitting, then, that a man does not feel the repentance and humiliation which he ought to feel, yet ought he not to feel them? And ought he not to seek them in the channels which God hath appointed for communicating them? If he calls to mind his sins; if he considers the majesty and holiness and goodness of God, against whom he has sinned; if he makes use of outward humiliation, as an indication that he ought to feel, and desires to feel, inward humiliation, he at least does that which has a tendency to produce it. I am sure that a contrary conduct has no such tendency. The words of our blessed Lord are strictly in point;—“To him that hath shall be given.” Let a man endeavour to do what he can, and what he ought; and however imperfectly it may be done, the

blessing of God will rest upon his endeavours. It, however, the question be repeated, When a man feels real repentance in his heart, what occasion can there be for the external expression of it? I answer, that, in proportion as men feel it, they will be disposed to shew it. No truly pious man can be unwilling to attend any ordinances or means of grace, which are calculated to call his religious feelings into exercise. Indeed, where the feelings themselves exist, the exercise of them is not only natural, but necessary. The very idea of true humiliation of heart implies every thing humble and lowly in the outward demeanour.

But there may be some disposed to argue; "Admitting all that has been said, why should fasting in particular be selected as an external mark of humiliation?" I answer, that had it been the will of God, doubtless something else might have been chosen. But, yet, none other occurs to me as a less objectionable expression of sorrow and humility. Fasting, it should be remembered, has always been the public token of humility; and this in heathen nations, as well as amongst Jews and Christians. Now this alone furnishes a strong plea for its adoption and continuance. It is sanctioned by the highest antiquity, and by the most general usage; enjoined of God upon the Jews; practised by our Saviour and his disciples; and recommended by them to the Christian world. Nor is this all;—fasting, it may be confidently said, has all the qualities which might reasonably be expected in an external act of humiliation. In the first place, it is a duty easily practised; requiring no apparatus; connected with no expense; simple in its own nature; equally adapted to all ranks, climates, and places. Moreover, it involves, as every mark of humiliation should, an act of self-denial; and this act, not so severe as to unfit it for general use, nor so slight, as inadequately to express its meaning. It has, moreover, this peculiar recommendation, that it is an act connected with the mortification of those very appetites, whence many of the sins, for which

we thus humble ourselves, proceed. Fulness of diet and unrestrained indulgence of appetite are frequent sources of intemperance, lust, pride, and extravagance. That act, therefore, has surely a singular propriety, which has a tendency to correct the evil for which it expresses our contrition.

Still it may be objected that fasting may disorder persons of weak health, and thus indispose them even for the service of the day. Undoubtedly it may; and therefore such persons are not only allowed, but bound, to use great caution in the performance of this duty. God is not a harsh master; nor does he ever enjoin such duties as are either impossible or injurious. Under the Jewish dispensation, indeed, a total fast was sometimes enjoined under severe penalties. But the spirit of the Christian system insists only on the principle, and leaves the application of it to the case and conscience of the worshipper. It requires repentance, humiliation, and mortification of the flesh, but leaves us to shew that repentance, to discover that humiliation, and to practise that mortification, as circumstances may admit, and our consciences direct.

If, therefore, it is asked.—What rule can you lay down as to the length and nature of abstinence? I answer,—None—and none is required. It is a voluntary act of self-denial. One man may be able to fast far longer than another, without the same mortification to himself, or injury to his constitution. Another cannot even fast at all; and yet may be equally desirous of humbling himself before God. Let no one, then, judge or condemn another. The Apostle's rule applies, in this respect:—"Meat commendeth us not to God; for neither if we eat, are we the better; neither if we eat not, are we the worse:" supposing, that is, in both cases, that the person eats or abstains uprightly and conscientiously. In like manner, no precise rule can be laid down respecting the kind of food which we may use. Formerly a far too artificial, as well as a too general, rule was established—that to eat fish

was compatible with fasting, but to eat flesh unlawful. In whatever right motive such a rule originated, it was obviously overstrained, and misapplied in a multitude of instances. The only rules, perhaps, which can safely be laid down are these:—To abridge yourself of all food which you can without injury spare; and, in using necessary refreshment, to use such alone as is least gratifying to the palate. Some self-denial ought to be exercised. This is essential to the nature of a fast; but the degree of it must be measured by every man's conscience and constitution. In general, it would appear, that one entire meal might be spared. But I am ashamed to dwell on minute circumstances. Let there be the real wish to humble yourself before God. Feel strongly and deeply that you are a sinner, desire earnestly to manifest your contrition, and you will be at no loss to determine in what manner it shall be shewn. One point is to be remembered, that it is a *voluntary* sacrifice. No person should be compelled to fast. Its very essence is, that it is voluntary, a willing act of humiliation before God.

To this last statement it has sometimes been objected, that a “public command to fast is a species of compulsion, and therefore inconsistent with the notion of a voluntary act of humiliation.” But to this I answer—that all which is done by the command of Government is this: it renders that convenient which might otherwise be very inconvenient, and that practicable which might be otherwise impracticable. It is proper, that when the judgments of God visit a nation, it should humble itself before him. It is proper also that this humiliation should be as general and as solemn as possible. A day, therefore, is set apart by authority, in which all may fulfil the universal duty. It is rendered generally practicable and convenient, by a general suspension of business. Whether, indeed, a man will avail himself of this opportunity of humiliation, is a matter which lies between himself and his God. But let him remember, he is responsible to God for refus-

ing; and therefore let him carefully weigh his reasons for such refusal. I am not speaking of those cases where a conscience, scrupulous but perhaps ill-informed, may interfere with the discharge of this duty. But, in all others, every good man, I should imagine, would joyfully use the prescribed occasion of drawing near to God, and prostrating himself before him, in order to enliven his repentance and strengthen his resolutions, to confess his wickedness and pray for grace to subdue it. A day thus spent is indeed a day redeemed from the folly and vanity of life.—And here let it be observed, that the mere abstinence from food constitutes but a small part of the solemnity of a fast day. The essence of the solemnity consists in the religious and holy manner in which the day is spent. It is a day of humiliation, as well as a day of fasting; and indeed these two things are inseparable in their nature. The fasting is only a part of the humiliation. But humiliation supposes the heart to be brought into a right disposition; and this demands retirement, self-examination, and religious exercises. This, then, my brethren, I would earnestly press upon you. If all cannot fast, all can enter into their chambers and supplicate their God. If, then, you desire to know how you are to keep the fast, I refer you to your own hearts. If they are deeply sensible of the injury you have offered to God, you will at once discover in what manner you should keep the day. You will be much alone. You will use extraordinary prayer. You will direct your attention to your own individual sins. National guilt is made up of the guilt of individuals, and national repentance of individual repentance. You will confess your guilt before God. You will select for meditation those passages of Scripture which are particularly appropriate to penitents, such as the Penitential Psalms. You will earnestly implore the pardon of your own sins. You will extend your prayers also to national events and public characters. You will pray for the king, that he may be protected and blessed; for the parliament,

that they may have wisdom from above to guide them, and that all their consultations may tend to the glory of God and the good of man: for the ministers of state, the judges, the magistrates, the clergy, that each, in their several stations, may fulfil their solemn and appointed duties. Thus you will prepare your heart for the worship of God; and thus prepared, you will worship him in his house with a devout spirit. You will endeavour to join in the service without languor or distraction. You will carry the same spirit and temper throughout the day. It will not be to you a day of worldly business; of recreation, of idleness, of wordly conversation, but a day consecrated to God, and devoted to religion. A fast-day, kept universally in this manner, would indeed be a national blessing.

There is yet another objection which might be urged, especially by some of the poorer classes—that it is unreasonable to expect them to give up a day's labour, and to abridge their diet who scarcely ever enjoy a full meal, and whose families can ill spare even the labour of a single day. Now, it must be admitted, that there is something apparently unequal and hard in the case of the poor. I allow, that a greater sacrifice is made by them, if they keep the day holy, than by others. I would contend also, that the rich ought not to let their workmen suffer in their temporal comforts by such an appointment. Still I would say to the poor what I before said to others—"Remember, it is a voluntary sacrifice: God enjoins no man to make it who is unwilling." But though the sacrifice is greater in your case than in that of others, it is surely not too great to make for Him who gives you life, and food, and raiment, and all which you possess. Remember, my poorer brethren, this life is not all your existence. It is only a very small part of it. Do not therefore call that time lost which is not spent in labouring for the body; God can easily restore tenfold your loss in the present life, and can give you life eternal. There are many who labour and toil incessantly without effect, because the bles-

ing of God does not give success to their rancours. I do not say that piety will always better your worldly circumstances; but this I say, that no man will really be a loser by serving God. Piety will at least prevent the excesses arising from debauchery, extravagance, and folly. The wages of a single day are a cheap price for habits which secure a blessing to every day of our lives.

Such then, my brethren, are some of the most common objections to fasting, and such some of the advantages which may be expected to result from it.—As to the first, I think you will see, that little importance is to be assigned to them. The benefits of public fasts, on the contrary, are established by a succession of facts in the history of the world, as recorded in the Scriptures. God had declared that he would destroy Nineveh; but Nineveh repented, and turned to the Lord with fasting, and the Lord pardoned it. Ahab, who was said to have sold himself to work wickedness, at length humbled himself and fasted, and “put on sackcloth;” and God said to his Prophet, “Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself: I will not bring evil in his days.” Jehosaphat, in the chapter of our text, is described as suddenly attacked by a large army. He set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast. And, on the very day of the fast, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, proclaiming that the Lord himself would fight for Judah, and destroy the enemy. And, accordingly, the army of Jehosaphat stood still, and saw the invaders perish by their own hands. These, my brethren, are so many monuments erected for the consolation and instruction of after-ages. They console us by the assurance, that the true penitent is the peculiar charge of Heaven. They teach us a lesson never to be forgotten by kings, nor by their people, that “righteousness exalteth a nation, and that happy is the people who have the Lord for their God.

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. JOHN VENN, M. A.

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RECTOR OF CLAPHAM.

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SERMON I.

ON THE CONDESCENSION AND GOODNESS OF GOD TO MAN.

Psalm viii. 4.

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the
son of man, that thou visitest him?*

IT is a happy circumstance when the contemplation of the works of nature leads the mind to reflect upon their great Author, and to adore him. This, however, is not always the case. With pain it must be acknowledged, that there have been philosophers who have measured the immense magnitude of the heavenly orbs, and surveyed the swiftness and order of their motion; who have examined the exquisitely curious structure of the human body, and observed how fearfully and wonderfully we are made; and yet have not been led by their admirable discoveries to worship and obey the great Creator. It was not thus with the Psalmist. You may figure to yourself the king of Israel, at the time he composed this Psalm, sitting by night in his garden, to contemplate the starry heaven, and watch the planets rolling through the serene at-

mosphere of an eastern sky. In him every faculty of the soul was sanctified, and every object ministered to the service of God. He breaks out, therefore, in the language of religious adoration:—"O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!—who hast set thy glory in the heavens!"—And then, considering the majesty of God, "the heavens, the work of his fingers; and the moon and the stars which he had ordained;" he cannot conceal his astonishment, that such a great and glorious God should notice a creature so insignificant as man, and visit him with his presence and blessing. "Lord," he adds, "what is man, that thou art mindful of him; and the son of man that thou visitest him?"

If we fall into the same train of meditation as the Psalmist, we may fix our thoughts upon the following points.

I. The meanness of man, and his unworthiness of the regard and affection of the Most High God.

II. The greatness and majesty of God, and yet the condescension and goodness which he has been pleased to shew, in being "mindful of man, and in visiting him."

I. The meanness of man, and his unworthiness of the regard and affection of the Most High God."—Whenever man singles out one of his fellow-creatures with peculiar regard, it is on account of some amiable or useful quality he supposes him to possess; his powers to entertain and communicate pleasure, his benevolence of disposition, his strict integrity, or his ability to grant protection and to confer benefits. These form the ordinary basis upon which esteem is built; and without some such basis, affection degenerates into a mere brutal instinct unworthy of a rational being. There must also be suitableness and correspondence between the persons allied in friendship. The great and noble unite themselves to persons in an elevated station. The learned and wise consort with persons of taste and knowledge. The pious and excellent seek

for companions amidst such as fear the Lord. In vain however, shall we look to these several sources of esteem, to account for that regard which God has been pleased to entertain for man: for when we survey man, and compare him with the Divine Being, there appears every thing which would tend to break the bonds of union. Such a dissimilarity of taste, as well as difference of rank, exists in this case; such a want of those dispositions which alone can appear amiable and excellent, in the eyes of a holy God, is discoverable in man; that it would appear to be almost morally impossible the glorious Jehovah should ever “be mindful of him, and visit him.”

I do not here set before you the intellectual meanness of man, or the scanty and limited nature of his powers and faculties; though indeed these, when compared with the excellent glory of the Divine Nature, would seem to form an insurmountable obstacle to union. For “what is man?” He is “like a thing of nought.” Take the noblest part of him, his mind.—Far be it from us to undervalue any of the works of God, and much less the chief of those works. But when our end is to exalt God, then surely we may say, as the Psalmist did, “yet let God be true and every man” be found “a liar,” or vanity, before him.—“What, then, is man,” with all his boasted powers? How scanty the limits of his comprehension! Instead of seeing, as a more perfect creature may see, all truth by intuition, what pains must he take, and what helps must he use; to what patient study and laborious investigation must he submit, in order to discover even a small part of that truth which is within his comprehension! I say, within his comprehension; for it is probably but a very small part indeed of the whole compass of knowledge which he is capable of discerning. Many of the sublime truths which relate to the existence of God, and to eternal things, it is impossible for him, however ardent his pursuit, to comprehend. And how dim is the light, even of that knowledge he does possess; how

mixed with error: how hardly acquired; how easily lost! But the natural defect and scantiness of his powers is not the point on which I would insist. There are more serious obstacles to an union between him and a holy God. There is a moral opposition between them. Man is a depraved and sinful, as well as a weak, creature. There prevails in him not merely a darkness with respect to spiritual things, but a dislike to them. He shuts his eyes against the light of truth: he is prone to ridicule, to despise, to revile it: he loves his own grovelling ideas; he is a slave to those corrupt passions which are hateful to God: he takes pleasure not merely in trifles, but in sin: his heart is the seat of vanity and vice; his understanding is blind to the beauty of Divine things: his will is no longer free to what is good: his memory is tenacious only of what is bad: his judgment is perverse; his affections are unhallowed.

It must be admitted, indeed, that there are remains of dignity in man which sometimes break forth and shew his original; his desires are sometimes great, and he pants after immortality: his spirit seems not unfrequently to burst the bonds of its prison, to feel indignant at its captivity to sin, and to aspire after a happier and holier state. But, setting aside the influence of the Spirit of God, with whom those better feelings originate, we may remark, that these very endeavours betray his weakness and corruption. Were there no knowledge of a better state: were no desires felt, and no efforts made to attain it, we could not so fully ascertain the feebleness of man. But when desires so strong generally fail, and attempts so earnest prove abortive, it is evident, there must be some radical defect and inherent corruption in man, which unfits him for what is truly great and excellent.

To know what man is, we ought not to consider of what he is capable under circumstances peculiarly favourable, but to look at him as he generally is. Cast your eyes, then, around the world. First contemplate the abundant means of grace, the awful remonstrances,

the clear instruction, the powerful motives God has employed for the reformation of mankind, and then observe the actual state of mankind. Mark the dissensions which prevail in it; nation rising up against nation: the feuds of private families or states; the acts of cruelty and fraud; the insatiable cravings of ambition; the secret workings of lust! Explore the hearts of men, and see how they are occupied; how low and sordid their desires; how foolish and vain their pursuits; how much of their time is consumed either in doing nothing or in doing wrong! It is a scene from which the philosopher, as well as the religious man, retires with disgust. "Lord, what is man?" Yet, of him, God is "mindful."

II. Let us, therefore, in the second place, contemplate the nature of the great and glorious God, and judge how unlikely it is that he should be "mindful of man, or visit him."

I am aware how little we are acquainted with the Divine Nature. But though we cannot tell what He is, we can say what he is not: though we cannot comprehend his perfections, we understand enough of them to see how unfit they appear for any union with man.

Consider, then, a Being, who, full and complete in himself, needs no addition, and feels no want; a Being who knows all things, embraces the past, the present, and the future, in one comprehensive glance:—a Being Almighty; who, by the simple exertion of his will, can create or destroy. "What is man, whose breath is in his nostrils," that such a Being should "regard him?" He sitteth in the circle of the heavens, and the inhabitants of the earth are as "grasshoppers before him. The nations are as the drop of the bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." "All nations before him are nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity." "Wherein then is man to be accounted of?"—The peculiar attribute of God is *holiness*. "Behold the very heavens are unclean in his sight, and he chargeth his angels with fol-

ly." How much more abominable, then, is man, who "drinketh in iniquity like water!"—God is also *just*. He reigns the King of the universe, and the glory of his character is the justice with which he sways the sceptre. And will not this form an eternal separation between God and man? Can he who is the avenger of sin, and the asserter of the honour of his law, dwell with sinners? What is there in man, which should excite any other sentiment than that of indignation and aversion in such a God? Can there be any harmony; is there any correspondence, any foundation for union between beings, not only so dissimilar in rank, in station, in character, and perfection; but even in disposition also? Is there not a manifest contrariety? Do we see things dissimilar accord with each other? Can angels accord with men? Can light be united to darkness, heaven to earth, God to man? "Lord, what is man, that Thou" the purest, the greatest, most perfect, most glorious of beings, "shouldest be mindful of him, and shouldest visit him?" Of all the acts of the Most High, perhaps there is not one which is in itself more extraordinary, and which affords greater matter of surprise and instruction to the angels than his dealings with the children of men.

It is true, indeed, that when we consider God only in the light of the *most benevolent of beings*, and man in the character of the most wretched, we may discover some reason why God should thus regard and visit his creatures; for there is an attraction between benevolence and misery. But then mere benevolence could be supposed to extend only to the relief of absolute necessity, or deliverance from immediate danger. No principles of common benevolence are sufficient to explain the gracious acts of God to man.

This leads us to consider more particularly the nature of that benevolence which God exercises towards us.

1. The Psalmist says, in the first place, that he is "*mindful of him*."—We are not to understand this expression as if it were merely opposed to his forgetting

him. God cannot forget any of his creatures. They are every one of them, at all times present to his view. Nor are we to suppose that it implies only a relief sparingly, and, as it were, unwillingly administered: though even such a degree of relief would shew a mindfulness of the distressed. But the word here employed bears, as is common in Scripture, a much larger sense than it seems, at first sight, to imply. It intimates, that God not merely remembers man, but keeps him constantly in view, ever watching over him, and never ceasing to do him good. A father is “mindful of his son” when he bears him in mind continually, when he is never long absent from his remembrance. Such is the mindfulness of God to us. He surveys our innumerable wants and he supplies them. He considers our dangers and he defends us from them. He is near to us in every time of difficulty and distress. “When thou passest through the waters,” he says to his people, “I will be with thee: they shall not overflow thee. When thou passest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.” If we go to the “uttermost parts of the earth, even there his hand shall lead” and protect us. “He will give his angels charge over us, lest at any time we dash our foot against a stone.”

Now what is man, that the Lord should thus be mindful of him!—that instead of leaving him to himself to enjoy happiness, or to perish, according as chance shall direct—just as we leave those inferior creatures in whose happiness our own is not concerned—he should thus watch over him, and protect him against unforeseen and unnumbered dangers? Yet, so minute is the providence of God that even “the hairs of our head are all numbered.”

2. But the goodness of God extends yet farther. It leads him not only to be “mindful of man,” but also to *visit him*.—This expression supposes more than mere care or providence. It implies a degree of union and regard which may well excite our surprise. “Lord, what is man, that thou *visitest* him?” A man is said to visit

another, when he comes to him in order to cultivate friendship and love. As far as this purpose is concerned, the difference of rank and station is laid aside, and the person "visited" is invited to acquaintance or friendship.

In explaining the metaphorical terms of Scripture, a degree of caution should be used, that we do not give them too literal an interpretation. In the case before us, however, we shall not err if we venture to use the term in its most literal sense.

Consider, for instance, the *temple of Jerusalem*.—God had indeed before pitched his tabernacle with man: but now he commanded Solomon to build him a house, and a house worthy of his greatness. And surely, when thus erected, by the command of the Most High, in the chief city of the Jews, its lofty towers seemed to say to the whole world, "Behold, God dwelleth with man!"—"But will God in very deed dwell with man?" we might justly exclaim, and be tempted to deny that the Most High, could be said to "visit man." Behold, then, a sensible proof. Behold the "glory of the Lord" descending at the dedication of the temple in a cloud of visible glory, and so filling the temple that the priests could not minister there on account of its brightness. Behold also that glory continue for successive generations within the veil, exhibiting, by the supernatural brightness of that part of the temple, a perpetual proof that God did indeed "visit man."

A still more illustrious testimony, that God does indeed visit man, is to be recognised in the *incarnation of his only begotten son*.—Behold him who was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person:" Him who was, from eternity, in the bosom of the Father; who "was with God, and was God;" coming down to "visit man;" coming not as the prince sometimes comes to visit the cottage of a poor man, in his proper dignity, conveying no benefit but the honour of his visit; but as one of our fallen race, that is to say, taking upon him our nature, dwelling as a man

amongst the children of men for many years, made in all respects like unto us, submitting himself to our infirmities, sympathizing in our sorrows, and laying out his life to do us good. Thus did the Son of God "visit man."

Nor, at *this day* are we to consider ourselves as less favoured: *still* God may be justly said to "visit man."—In the appointment of a day for worship, of ministers to officiate, and of a house sacred to himself, God plainly proves his willingness to "visit man." These are indications, that, "if we seek him, he will be found;" that if we "call upon him, he will be nigh to us." Above all, the *holy sacrament*, in which we are invited to sit down at the table of the Lord, and to hold communion with *Him* who is the Head of the Church, and who thus teaches us to consider him as immediately present in our assemblies, seems designed to shew us that God does indeed "visit man."

In like manner, the *providential dispensations* of our Heavenly Father may be considered as further proofs of this disposition on his part. What is it but a sensible sign of the presence of the Almighty when he delivers us from sudden dangers; when he relieves us in the moment of our extremity; when he raises us from the bed of sickness, and restores our life, and renews our strength?

Still more plainly may the Lord be said to "visit us," when, in *trying seasons*, we call upon him for help, and he supports our fainting spirits, hears our prayers, comforts us by the sense of his love, enlarges our hopes, strengthens our faith, and "lifts up the light of his countenance upon us."—The Throne of Grace is appointed as the scene where we may meet God:—and the hour of affliction is the season in which God is particularly needed, and in which, therefore, he generally gives to the soul which seeks him the most sensible proofs that he will "visit man" with his presence, and bless him.

To conclude; you have heard, my brethren, that God will “in very deed dwell with man.” He will be “mindful of him, and visit him.”—What tidings are these! What an honour is conferred upon us! What a privilege is bestowed! An honour so little to be expected! A privilege so little deserved! What is there, not comprehended in this blessing, which man could desire? We might indeed dread the visit of God, if he came as a Judge to mark our transgressions against him. We might dread his visit, if he came to remonstrate and to reprove. But the visit of God is a visit of love. He comes only for purposes of mercy. It is to bless us that he visits us. What, then is the reception we give this Heavenly Visitor? Are we sensible of the honour? Do we say, in the language of true humility, “Who are we, that the Lord should be mindful of us; and that the Most High should visit us!” Is God a welcome visitor to us?—How many are there who endeavour to exclude him? He knocks at the door of the heart by his providence, by his calls, by his warnings, by the motions of his Holy Spirit; but they refuse to give him admittance. What preparation do we ourselves make for receiving him? Do we take care to be ready? Do we prize his condescension? Do we improve his kindness? Do we endeavour to remove from our hearts every thing that would offend him—all murmuring—all unbelief—all distrust of his providence and love? Let us consider well what a favour is done to us. The Lord of heaven is not to be refused. He has paid no visit to the fallen angels. It is to fallen man only that he shews this indulgence. Let me, then, conclude by urging upon you these two considerations:—What may you not expect from the loving kindness of the Lord, when he thus “visits” you, *if indeed you receive him?* And what must you not dread from his displeasure, *if you live and die despising the “visits” of the Most High?*

SERMON II.

JACOB AND ESAU.

Gen. xxvii. 35.

And he said, thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.

IN many facts of history recorded by the sacred penman, he merely relates the story, without making any comments upon it. This simplicity of narration is peculiar to the ancient historians. The practice of modern times is different. The historian now commonly conveys his own judgment on that which he records: he intersperses reflections: he displays himself as well as his subject.—This plainness of the ancient writers may be attended either by good or bad consequences. The beneficial consequences are these: that we are led to reason for ourselves, and that we are compelled in so doing to increase the diligence and accuracy of our examination. One of the mischievous consequences (I speak particularly with respect to the sacred writers) is, the danger of approving the actions related of good men, whenever the historian has not marked them with a note of disapprobation. The case adverted to in the text, in which Jacob obtains the “blessing by subtilty” from his father, is of this kind.

No censure is passed upon it by Moses; and an inadvertent reader might consider it only in the light of a trick, displaying considerable ingenuity of contrivance and dexterity of execution. But though the sacred writer does not stop to descant on Jacob's guilt, the subsequent history of Jacob plainly discovers a just Providence punishing his sin, and reads to us a lesson as instructive as though the inspired penman had inscribed in the front of it, "Behold here the baneful effects of fraud!" It may be useful to contemplate the whole story.

We find, in the xxvth of Genesis, that Esau and Jacob were brothers; and that the Lord replied to the inquiries of Rebecca concerning her children, by saying, that they should be the heads of two nations, and that "*the elder should serve the younger.*"—Thus was a prophecy delivered, that Esau should serve Jacob; or, at least, that the posterity of Esau should serve that of Jacob. It may please God to foretel future events, but it is not therefore our duty to endeavour by crooked means to bring them to pass. God does not give us prophecy for our rule of conduct. He will accomplish his purposes in his own manner. It may be happy for us that we understand so little of his secret purposes. In this very instance, some knowledge of his intention may possibly have laid the foundation of the fraud of Jacob, and the unhappiness of Rebecca.

As Esau and Jacob grew up, we read, that "Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field; but that Jacob was a plain man (*i.e.* a quiet, peaceable, domestic man), "dwelling in tents." "Isaac," it is said, "loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison," but Rebecca loved Jacob. The foundation of the most material errors in life are often laid at a very early period. Parents are frequently disappointed in their offspring, and troubled during their lives, through a cause which they little suspect. They complain of their children, when perhaps the fault may be in themselves. They have indulged an early partiality, founded upon no just rea-

sons, which has been productive, on each side, of the worst effects. There is but one true ground of preference with respect to children, to friends, to neighbours; to acquaintance; namely, that of real excellence. But how many false, and frivolous, and artificial distinctions have been introduced by the caprice, the pride, the false taste, of the world. The case of Isaac and Rebecca illustrates this remark. Their own unhappiness and the discord of their children were chiefly referable to a foolish and unfounded partiality in themselves. "Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison;" and Rebecca loved Jacob, because his temper and habits led him to be much with her in the tent. When will men learn to watch their partialities, their prejudices, and their passions? Providence often points out the sin in the punishment, and teaches parents discretion in the management of their children, by setting before their eyes the evil effects which follow from the want of it.

We read, soon after, of Esau's selling his birthright for a mess of pottage.—It appears from this concise story, that there was no great harmony between the young men; and indeed it could not be expected. Isaac and Rebecca had laid the ground for jealousies and animosities between them. The one was the favourite of the father; the other of the mother. They were thus made rivals, and from rivals became enemies to each other. The profaneness of Esau in selling his birthright, to which was annexed a blessing usually valued at the highest rate, must be admitted. But while we blame Esau, let us give the just share of censure to Jacob, who refused to relieve his brother's hunger, except at a price as culpable in the one to require as it was in the other to pay. According to the account of the historian, Jacob requires from his brother an oath that he would give him up his birthright. But had Esau any power to surrender it? And would it be supposed that he who despised his birthright would regard an oath, obtained under such circumstances? Men

often call in the sanction of religion to promote their temporal advantages, when real piety would teach them to forego those very advantages; in short, all advantages which are not obtained in a fair and honourable manner.

We come now to the transaction, circumstantially related in the chapter from which my text is taken. Jacob comes with "subtily," and obtains the "blessing from Esau."

"Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," being perhaps considerably more than a hundred years old. Uncertain how soon his death might take place, he determines to give his solemn and prophetic blessing to his eldest son. Rebecca hears him express his intention; and now all her feelings for Jacob are called forth. Hitherto, perhaps, her partiality had displayed itself in trifles, though it had produced the most mischievous consequences. Now, however, when a peculiar temptation occurred, she proceeds to sacrifice to it truth, honour, justice, and common honesty. We ought to judge of the evil of our passions not by the effects which they have produced, but rather by those which they may produce under circumstances of temptation. The criminality of Rebecca's partiality, which, perhaps she had not suspected, now discovered itself. It led her to deceive, to lie, and to defraud. It was obviously her duty to leave to God the performance of his promise. But she considered the hour as come. Isaac would in a few hours give the blessing to Esau, and Jacob be deprived of it. What must she do? Not a moment was to be lost. The design of God to give the superiority to Jacob would, she thought, excuse some degree of fraud. She meant to further the Divine intentions. But we ought to know that the secret, and even the revealed, decrees of the Almighty, make no change in the moral evil of an action. God may as severely punish the man who executes, as the man who opposes, his will, if each is alike acting in his own spirit, and pursuing his own ends.

Rebecca, having formed her plan, communicates it to Jacob. Two reasons might concur in leading him to fall in with it: regard for his mother, and jealousy of Esau, arising out of his father's partiality. Scruples would indeed obtrude; but interest would plead irresistibly against them. Probably also he might either infer from the prophecy, that God intended for him the blessing, or assume that he was entitled to it by right of purchase. How awfully does interest pervert the judgment, and palliate the worst actions! The scruples of Jacob being obviated, he considered how to carry the deceit into effect. Alas! that so much wickedness should be committed to obtain a blessing! The end was good. Religion itself pointed out its value. But the attainment of a good object, by bad means, must always be extremely sinful.

While Jacob hesitates, Rebecca is not afraid to urge him to the imposture: "Upon me be the curse, my son; only obey my voice." Oh, what a situation for a mother—for a mother, who, it might be hoped, had been a suitable companion for the patriarch Isaac! we see her in circumstances humiliating indeed!—urging her son to an act of fraud upon his father, and perfidy towards his brother, and using her maternal authority to ensure compliance! "Upon me be the curse!" But this would not acquit Jacob: the punishment, as we shall afterwards see, fell with a heavy weight upon both.—Jacob, thus prepared, goes in to Isaac, and practises the lesson which his mother had taught him. But sins are seldom solitary: one transgression naturally begets another: Jacob adds hypocrisy to fraud, and lying to deceit. "How," asked his father, "is it that thou hast found the venison so quickly?" And Jacob said, "Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." Never does iniquity appear more odious than when arrayed in the garb of religion. "And Isaac said unto Jacob, Art thou my son, my very son Esau? And he said, I am."

Thus far all was successful: the deceit and falsehood obtained the blessing. But short is the triumph of the unjust. While the words yet sounded in the ears of Jacob, the fear of the approach of Esau, the dread of his vengeance, the stings of a guilty conscience, the apprehension of the consequences, would present themselves to the troubled mind of Jacob, and teach him the bitterness of his transgression. Esau, indeed, lost the blessing which he had before despised; a proof that the visitation of crimes often sleeps for a time, and that vengeance may awake when the misdeed itself is almost forgotten. Perhaps the remembrance both of the profaneness of Esau, and of the declarations of prophecy, now rushed into the mind of Isaac; and while they pointed out the hand of God, compelled him to say, "I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed."

Let us next contemplate the feelings of Jacob and Rebecca. Their imposture had succeeded; but it was a success which, as we shall see, embittered the whole life, both of Jacob and of his parents. Rebecca, the contriver of the fraud, was deprived of her favourite child, probably for the remainder of her days. He, who should have been the stay and the consolation of her declining years, was a stranger in a distant land, banished from his home by means of an act of sin. How bitter, then, would be the blessing which it cost so much to obtain! How, as he wandered a fugitive from his father's house, would the very object of the fraud seem to be defeated! Instead of the "elder serving the younger," Jacob was a poor and banished stranger, in continual terror of his brother.

Nor did the evil terminate here. The hatred of Esau for Jacob naturally increased to the highest pitch. He determined even upon his murder. Hence arose new alarms to Jacob. In all places, and at every moment, he feared to encounter Esau. The value of that prosperity was unfelt which it was doubtful whether he should live to enjoy. At every step, the retribu-

tive justice of Providence pursued him. First, he who had imposed upon his father was himself imposed upon by his uncle in the circumstances of his marriage. Next, the continual jealousies, and hatred between his wives, Leah and Rachel, must have reminded him of his own want of brotherly affection. His sin also was visited upon him in his own family. Continual feuds prevailed amongst his children, and he who was most beloved by the father was most hated by the rest. At length, he was the dupe of an imposture, more successful even than that by which he had deceived his father. Joseph, his beloved son, was sold by his brethren, and stated to be slain. In a word, the rest of the life of Jacob was signalized by scenes of domestic trouble and vexation, which had their origin either in the unhappy step we are considering or in kindred evils. At the close of his life, he justly said, "Few and evil have been my days." And he might have added, "I am a melancholy example of deviating from the path of simplicity and virtue."

Some important reflections upon this story naturally suggest themselves, which I think it right to state.

1. First, the history furnishes a lesson to parents.—Let them guard against partiality towards their children. Let them know no other preference than that which arises from superior excellence. God has made them equally the guardians of all their children; and they who mismanage an important trust, and neglect a serious duty, must expect to suffer for it.

2. Let it, secondly, be a lesson to children to beware of mutual unkindness.—Esau was, indeed, "profane;" but this was no excuse for the unkindness of his brother. The peace of Isaac's family was destroyed by the abuse of affection and by the spirit of rivalry. Many children instead of trusting to Providence as to the affection of their parents, and calmly and kindly discharging their duty, indulge a mean and selfish disposition. They regard their brothers and sisters with jealousy and hatred; "My brother," they say, "is more

a favourite than I." How frequently does this vile selfishness poison every source of domestic enjoyment, and diffuse misery in a widely-extended circle!

3. Let us learn from this story, not to make the supposed designs of God the rule of our conduct: I say "supposed designs;" for, in our case, they can be only supposed. It was wrong in Rebecca and in Jacob to draw out even the revealed purposes of God into a rule of action; when, to forward this, they were obliged to deviate from the path of integrity. It is happy for us, that the course of duty is clearly pointed out: we should follow what is just, and fair, and honourable, and leave the consequences to God. It is interest which blinds our eyes. Instead of inquiring what is right, we are too apt to ask what is most for our interest. This sophistry generally leads both to error and sin.

4. We are thus brought to a fourth observation; namely, that the way to success is often not that which appears the shortest, and even the surest; and that success, in some instances, is rather a curse than a blessing. Had Jacob permitted God to accomplish his declaration by the means appointed; had his own conduct to his brother been, as it should have been, kind and affectionate; we cannot doubt that the history of Jacob would have been very different. His life might then have been as remarkable for happiness and peace, as it is for calamity and disquietude. The true source of prosperity is the blessing of God; and he often regulates the dispensations of his providence according to our estimate of his favour. There are circumstances in the life of every man which may corroborate this truth. A man is exposed to temptation: some great advantage offers itself: a little art or deceit in supplanting another is thought indispensable: excuses are not wanting to justify the act. But what, in general is the result? That success is more to be deprecated than failure. When will men reflect, that "God reigns, and that they can obtain nothing without

him?" that if he withhold his favour, the ground will wither, the fair prospect vanish, and success itself prove our ruin?

5. Let us learn, lastly, that our disappointments and punishments may be our blessings.—Jacob obtained, in the end, a blessing; but a blessing very different from that which he expected. He never himself ruled over Esau; though his posterity ruled over that of Esau. But another blessing followed, which, though little desired or anticipated, was the only substantial blessing, that of being long and severely chastised, and thus deeply humbled for his crime. Had not God been so gracious to him, he might have prospered here, and inherited an everlasting curse in the world to come. I therefore regard the series of calamities which followed Jacob through life, as proofs of the Divine mercy towards him. God thus chastened him, as a wise father chastises his son to bring him to repentance. Happy the man who, when thus chastened, returns to God, discovers that in "judgment he remembers mercy," obeys the impulse of a Father's hand, and is purified by those fires of affliction which consume and destroy the hardened and impenitent!

SERMON III.

ON DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN AGENCY.

Phil. ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

THE controversy about grace and free agency has been one of the most common and most lasting in the Church. The two doctrines have been supposed incompatible; for if it is God who, of his mere grace, works in us to will and to do, to what purpose, say some persons, is it to exhort man to work out his own salvation? And if, on the other hand, man has power to act freely, why, it is asked, do you assert his general inability, and maintain his whole sufficiency to depend upon the good pleasure of God? A difficulty there certainly is in holding both these doctrines in such a manner as not to contradict each other; and it is a difficulty which perhaps, in the present infirm state of human nature, may never be completely removed.

The Scripture, we may observe, never attempts, either to satisfy mere curiosity, or to answer metaphysi-

cal questions. Without aiming to shew that the doctrines do not clash, or to explain the precise way in which they are to be reconciled, the sacred writers assert both. As though man were possessed of the most perfect free will, they exhort, rebuke, command, entreat, and promise; treat him as responsible, or condemn him as guilty. On the other hand, as though he possessed no power at all, they ascribe his whole power, wisdom, goodness, and salvation, to the mere grace of God working in him. Nay, not only do they not attempt to reconcile these doctrines, but, taking for granted their perfect compatibility, they even unite and connect them. They speak of them at the same time, and in the same place: they ground one upon the other. Thus our Saviour says, "Abide in me, and I in you." And, in my text, the Apostle makes the grace of God the very foundation for our exertion—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

In like manner will every truly humble Christian, who acts rather than disputes, unite, in his practice these two doctrines. He will be as diligent and active in his exertions—he will as sincerely condemn his faults, and own his responsibility for them—as though man were endued with the highest and most extensive powers. At the same time, he will be as humble, as fervent in prayer for Divine assistance, as thankful to God for any progress in grace, as though man were, in the fullest sense of the word, incapable of action. It has, on the contrary, been the error of some, who have perplexed themselves with speculation, rather than employed themselves in religious practice, and the crime of others who have sought to indulge either their pride or their sloth, to separate what the Apostles have united. Holding one doctrine in its most rigid and absolute sense, they have either totally denied the other, or so explained it away as to deprive it of all practical influence.

If either doctrine had been revealed in Scripture without the other, it is evident there would have been a set of duties on the part of man in some measure different from what are now required of him. If God, for instance, had merely proclaimed his own grace without issuing any commands to mankind, it would have been our duty to have used no efforts: our case would then have resembled that of the Israelites upon the banks of the Red Sea, when the injunction given to them was;—"Fear ye not: stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew you this day; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."—If, again, practical exhortations had been issued without any revelation of the grace of God, it would have been our duty to encourage ourselves to exertion with such arguments as the Philistines used when the ark of God was brought into the camp of Israel. "And the Philistines were afraid. And they said, Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Quit yourselves like men, and fight." But, on the other hand, unite the two doctrines, and the sentiments and feelings of a Christian become like those of Hezekiah, when he gathered the captains of war together, and "spake comfortably to them, saying;—Be strong and courageous: be not afraid or dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles."

It is, then, the union of the two doctrines which tends to form the peculiar character of a Christian. Each serves to illustrate and strengthen the other; and if either be removed, not only are those duties and graces injured and destroyed which immediately result from that, but those also which appear to be derived

wholly from the other. But this point I hope more fully to establish in the following discourse.

I. The grace of God, then, so far from being designed to relax or supersede our own efforts, tends to quicken our diligence. "Work out," says the apostle, "your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you."—If we advert to the context, we shall find the argument to be of this nature. The apostle, after having spent some time with the Philippians, and having rejoiced in the contemplation of their excellencies, had lately left them. With the tenderest affection for them, and a jealousy which that affection naturally inspired, he exhorts them to continue to conduct themselves, during his absence, in the same upright manner as when he was present with them. He reminds them, that, though *he* was absent, yet there was still present with them a superintendant of their conduct, whom they should more fear to offend than the apostle Paul. "Wherefore (he says) my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not in my presence only, so now, much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Now a stronger or more appropriate argument the apostle could not have used. The love which the Philippians felt for their pastor was a powerful motive with them to watch over their conduct. Unwilling, and even afraid to grieve him, they attended with scrupulous exactness to the kind instructions and admonitions which he gave them. With how much more solicitude then, nay, with what "fear and trembling," he argues, ought they to "work out their salvation," since it was God whom they resisted if they did not! It was God who by his Spirit admonished them; it was God who infused into them desires, which they should be afraid of stifling; it was God who gave them power "to do," which power they should therefore be afraid to waste or abuse. Thus, the very grace of God in "working in us, not only to do, but even to will," is

made the foundation of our "working out our own salvation." Upon this principle, we ought to blame, not our weakness, but our perverseness, if we are not saved. We should fear, nay, we should "tremble" at the thought of displeasing God by neglecting his gracious admonitions, and quenching his Holy Spirit.

II. The grace of God has a tendency not merely to increase the efforts of man, but to direct them in a right channel.—Were man left to his own endeavours, he would combat his spiritual enemies with carnal weapons alone. He would employ, perhaps, the arguments of the ancient philosophers, encourage himself by the imperfect or corrupt motives which they used, and strengthen himself by the means which they employed. Pride would be made the chief instrument of repressing other vices: vanity and self-love would exclude from his breast other passions: the utility of virtue to his health, to his convenience, to his reputation, and to his comfort, would be the exclusive source whence arguments would be drawn, and means furnished for its acquirement. But not such is the Christian armour. From the grace of God the real Christian derives his resources. This directs the mode of his exertions: this teaches him, that, as all the benefit is derived from God, he must seek all from God, and hope to accomplish his end by seeking it in the way which God has appointed. This explains the nature of Christian diligence. I say *Christian* diligence: for it is not mere diligence which is required of us, but diligence exerted in a Christian manner:—To distinguish, for instance, between the two cases: The person who depends upon his own endeavours will not be solicitous to pray to God, but will depend chiefly upon his own resolutions, and the unassisted powers of his mind. But the man relying upon the grace of God will consider prayer as one of the principal instruments of success. He will not indeed neglect other means, but prayer will hold the first place in his esteem. Hence he will be active, constant, and earnest in pouring out his heart before

God, in lamenting to him his weakness, and begging aid at his hands. In like manner, the reading of the word of God, neglected or perverted by the first class, will be diligently practised by him who considers that it is God only who "works in us to will and to do." He will read it not merely to acquire some new ideas of Christian doctrine, not merely to enlighten his understanding; but, knowing that God blesses the diligent inquirer by the teaching of his Holy Spirit, and the application of his word to the conscience, he will read with expectation of profit, though the truths and arguments he meets with are already familiar to his mind.—Thus the means of grace which God has been pleased to appoint for our edification will be conscientiously used by a real Christian; because it is in the use of these means he chiefly expects that the grace of God will be communicated. In all his endeavours, this grace will be the principal object of pursuit. Others employ the appointed means solely on account of their proper force; and they look no further than their natural effect, independent of the grace of God working in them. But the Christian looks beyond this, and seeks for the power of God to be exerted through them. Thus, sensible of their value, he feels also the necessity of *caution*. Think not that he says in his heart, "It is God only who works in me, and therefore I need not be anxious about my success." His language is, Since it is God who alone worketh in his people—since he blesses only a diligent use of the appointed means—since he refuses his Spirit to the slothful and profane—it becomes us to beware lest any man "fail of the grace of God"—lest, by our negligence, we forfeit his blessing—lest, by our sloth, we provoke him to leave us to the natural hardness and corruption of our hearts.

III. The belief of the grace of God also implants *humility* in the mind.—He who laboured diligently and successfully in the work of the Lord might, perhaps, be in danger of being puffed up by it, if the

knowledge of the Source of his success had no tendency to repress boasting and pride. This knowledge secures his humility. For what has he, that he has not received? Has he been active—who gave him that activity? Has he been successful—who is the author of success? Has he persevered?—it is God who hath kept him from falling. Hence the Apostle, speaking of his labour in the Church, adds, in a truly Christian spirit, “I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was in me.” Though we are enabled to serve God yet no praise is due to man on account of it. All boasting is utterly excluded. It is God who wrought in us “to will as well as to do.” Nothing could be claimed by us as a reward of merit or debt of justice, and, therefore, it is by the grace of God that we are what we are.

IV. In like manner a persuasion of the grace of God has a tendency to produce *gratitude*.—He who esteems himself indebted to his own prudence, wisdom and resolution alone, for the safety of his state, will feel little disposition to thanksgiving and praise. But he who has known and experienced the grace of God in Christ Jesus will be qualified and disposed to offer up the most grateful thanks to God Almighty. Taught to ascribe every holy desire to his influence, and every victory over sin to his grace, under what obligations will he not esteem himself to his Preserver and Benefactor? “It was his kind hand,” he will say, “which protected me from the power of sin. To myself I can ascribe nothing but perverseness, sloth, and folly. My part has too often been to resist his holy influence, and to turn from the path of his commandments. If, therefore, I have been quickened and strengthened; if I have been brought back when I wandered; if I have been supported when in danger of falling; to the Lord’s goodness I would ascribe it, and bless his holy name.” Thus the saints of old ascribed all the glory and praise to God. “Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name, O Lord, be the praise!” “If the Lord himself had

not been on our side when men rose up against us, it had not failed but we had been put to silence." Thus, also, the saints in heaven ascribe the whole glory of their salvation to God, "saying, with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth, and under the earth, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever." And, surely, if this life is to be considered as a school of preparation for another world, in which we are to honour and serve God with our whole heart, and soul, and strength; in no way can we more effectually promote the end of our being, than by calling to mind his benefits, who "forgiveth all our iniquities, who healeth all our diseases, who redeemeth our life from destruction, who crowneth us with loving-kindness and tender mercies.

V. I add, lastly, that the knowledge of the grace of God has a powerful tendency to *encourage* us in our exertions.—Were we commanded only to work out our own salvation: were we merely required to be holy, and taught that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; the very commands and motives to obedience might perhaps, have an effect directly opposite to their intention. Man, full of pride and conceit when he undertakes a work, becomes irresolute, timid, and despairing when he finds his success disproportionate to his labours. And, therefore, in the great work of salvation, in which so many difficulties unite, and often seem to increase at every step, he requires great encouragement: and such encouragement the Gospel bestows. When a person begins in sincerity to serve God, he will dwell chiefly upon the duties and powers of man; but when he has had much experience of his own heart, he will fix his attention and rest his hopes upon the grace of God. Novelty, terror and hope, may combine, for a time, to make him "earnest to work out his salvation;" but soon these

will cease to affect the mind. Then the only resource (but blessed be God, it is both a sure and abiding resource) is in the grace of God. Here is the encouragement of a Christian. We labour, not from any high opinion of our own powers, but because we trust in that God who inspires us with desire, and whose grace and goodness are immeasurably great, and who has promised not to forsake those who call upon him. Thus, with the Psalmist, when the Lord says, "Seek ye my face," our hearts will reply, "Thy face, Lord, will we seek."

In these particulars, my brethren, we see the genuine effect of a reliance upon the grace of God, we see that it does not relax our endeavours. We are required to use them with as much earnestness as if they were available of themselves with God, and as if our salvation depended solely upon them. Nor is this all. The doctrine of the grace of God has a powerful effect upon them. It encourages, and it increases them: at the same time, it gives them their proper direction; it prevents their being derived from false principles or tending to corrupt ends; it purifies them from pride, and sanctifies them by humility and gratitude. In fine, it associates with them those peculiar dispositions which it was the design of the Gospel to implant in man.

Let me conclude this subject with a few suitable reflections.

1. I would call upon you then, my brethren, to *acknowledge the goodness of God in providing for the salvation of man*.—Behold what help he has afforded you! Even he himself "worketh in you to will and to do." No one, therefore, has a right to allege his inability as an excuse for him. It is true, that God must do all things in us; that he must "work in us to will, as well as to do;" but what is the true inference from this fact? "Therefore work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Be afraid of refusing the calls and invitations of God, and of despising his agency on the soul. He calls you, generally, by his word; and

if you feel any convictions of guilt, or desires after the knowledge and favour of God, in these instances he calls you more particularly by the actings of his Spirit upon your conscience. Do not then slight these admonitions. Do not reject the offers of Almighty God. Receive them as you ought, "with fear and trembling." At the same time, let these offers, these most gracious offers of Divine help, be the greatest encouragement to your souls. "With him you can do all things." Depend upon his aid. Seek it in the way he has appointed. Know that your salvation is not only of God, but that the manner of obtaining it is so appointed as to manifest it to be wholly of him. It is a way of dependence, of faith, of ascribing to God all the glory, of labouring in the strength of the Lord, of ascribing to him all the praise. It is a way of humiliation on man's part, but of exaltation on that of God. Let it be your care, therefore, to derive all your hope and encouragement from God, and to consecrate all your endeavours to his glory.

Lastly, *Charge not God with the consequences of your own perverseness.*—Say not, that he refuses his aid, and therefore you can do nothing; but inquire seriously, whether you have not been guilty of resisting his motions, and opposing his intentions. He has "wrought in you to will and to do;" but have you therefore "wrought out your salvation with fear and trembling?" Has the sense of this unspeakable favour on God's part made you humble and earnest to do his will, and jealous of yourself lest you should grieve him? Here, perhaps, you may plead guilty. Say not, then, that God does not vouchsafe you his grace; but, rather, humble yourself before him for your past neglect. When God works in you "to will," it is often by strong convictions of past unworthiness and unfruitfulness. These, you may now have, and, perhaps, be resisting them. God, therefore, may be working in you, though you consider it not, and are even opposing his gracious intentions. What you want may be humili-

ty and repentance; and these God may be teaching you, though you are too dull of understanding to perceive the movements of his hand. Pray, therefore, to God, and humble yourself before him, and he will lift you up. And be assured, that at the last day, all our proud and presumptuous thoughts will vanish before him: that, on the one hand God will appear to have been both just and merciful to his creatures; and, on the other, the destruction of men will clearly appear to have proceeded wholly from themselves, and to be the natural and just effect of their own transgressions.

SERMON IV.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN.

Rev. xxi. 3—5.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the Throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

THE mind of man ought to be impressed with an anxious desire of knowing what will be his state, when he is removed out of this transitory life. We see our friends taken away from us; and we know that in a short time, we ourselves shall be summoned to depart hence, and to enter the region of spirits; and no one has yet been permitted to return from that unknown country, to answer the numerous inquiries which we should be eager to make concerning its nature and enjoyments. The Book of God indeed, which informs us of every thing necessary for man to know, has

partly removed the veil; and although it has not told us enough to satisfy curiosity, it has done what is far more important: it has given us such a representation of the glory of the world to come as, without explaining its precise nature, may serve to elevate our expectations to the highest pitch, to kindle our warmest desire, to inspire us with fortitude under the evils of this transitory life, to dispose us to consider the attainment of heaven as the only object which deserves our solicitude and exertions.

In the description given, in my text, of heaven, three particulars are contained:—

I. *The peculiar residence of God amongst men.* “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.”

II. *The special relation in which its inhabitants stand to God, and God to them.* “They shall be his people; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

III. *The new circumstances in which they will be placed.* “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away: and He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”

I. The first particular of the heavenly state described in my text is, the *immediate presence and residence of God*.—Now God, being every where present, cannot, strictly speaking, be said to dwell more in one place than in another. And as God is equally present in every place, so he pays an equal attention to every part of the universe. He as perfectly observes all that is transacted, either in the remotest recess of hell or the most obscure place on earth, as that which is done in heaven. Whenever, therefore, God is said in the Scripture specially to dwell in any place, we are to understand, that he there peculiarly *manifests* his presence; he there, in a particular manner, exerts his power,

displays his agency, reveals his glory, or pours forth the stores of his bounty. Hence, of old he was said to *dwell in the tabernacle*; for there he revealed his will: there the children of Israel applied for help, and obtained deliverance from their oppressors: thence the pestilence was dispatched, as it were, to punish the disobedient: and there the pardon of transgressors was announced.—In a still more appropriate sense, God was said to *dwell in the temple*. A visible brightness indicated somewhat of the glory of God: wonderful and miraculous displays of power, mercy, and love, denoted his peculiar presence.—In like manner, the Spirit of God, is said to *dwell in the hearts of real Christians*: that is, he manifests his presence in them by the exertions of Divine power and mercy, by enlightening the soul with knowledge, by sanctifying it with grace, by supporting and cheering it with Divine consolations.—These scriptural ideas will serve to explain to us more clearly the meaning of God's "dwelling in heaven." In heaven, the Divine glory, wisdom, holiness, power and love, will be exhibited in the strongest colours. As a glory formerly filled the holy of holies: not that the glory was God, but only a sensible indication of his presence; so may the brightest glory be supposed perpetually to illuminate every part of those blessed regions: "for they shall have no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine therein: for the glory of God does enlighten them, and there shall be no night there." There will the mind be continually astonished, delighted, and elevated by proofs of wisdom, not obscure, or sparing, or finite, but clear, and manifest, and boundless. There, too, the *holiness and purity* of the Divine Nature will beam forth in rays of lustre: not such, indeed as will dazzle the beholder, but rather such as will illuminate him with their splendour, and transform him into the same celestial "image, from glory to glory." There will be exhibited the most stupendous acts of Divine *power*. There also will be poured forth, in the richest profusion and variety, and the

most exquisite perfection, the treasures of Divine *goodness*. And there will the *love* of the Father and of Jesus Christ his only begotten Son shine in its fullest effulgence.

Thus God “dwells” in heaven by the boundless manifestation of every thing great, and glorious, and good. Upon this earth, indeed, we see on every side some proofs of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness; the rich variety of plants adorned with all the vividness of colour and elegance of form; the magnitude of the heavenly bodies, the skill of their arrangement, and the swiftness of their motions; the exquisite conformation of the body and the admirable and diversified powers of the mind;—all these proclaim the presence and the hand of a Master, whose wisdom must be infinite and power uncontrollable. But these no otherwise apprise us of the skill of the great Architect than the broken columns, the disjointed arches, and the mouldering capitals of some fine ruined edifice convey to us an adequate idea of the beauty and grandeur of the original building. We live here in the ruins of a world once indeed fair and glorious, but now forsaken by its great Master, and suffered to fall into decay; and the traces which we meet with of greatness and splendour are comparatively few and mean. Here every thing is mingled with imperfection. Light is obscured by darkness: truth is intermingled with error; good with evil: pleasure is alloyed by pain: health is interrupted by sickness; and every enjoyment is transitory and uncertain. His wisdom and power are here displayed upon objects of comparatively little worth. The leaf of a weed may discover wonderful skill; the shell of a contemptible fish may display the richest colouring; the body of the vilest of men may shew astonishing contrivance, yet all these things are, as it were, the rough sketches of Infinite Wisdom: they are intended only for a moment: they will soon be burnt up as things of no value. We have yet to learn what is the *fulbess* of the Divine Wisdom and goodness.

I do not pretend to explain, or even to conjecture, in what manner the glorious proofs of the Divine perfections will be exhibited to us above. It is sufficient for us to know that they *will be* exhibited; and we see enough, even now, of the Divine wisdom, to raise our expectations of a future display to all that is great and glorious; to that which the eye hath not seen, and which the heart of man cannot conceive. The infant of to day is as well able to apprehend the nature of the world in which it finds itself, as man with all his boasted sagacity, to conceive the nature of the world to come. Let us rest satisfied that it will afford a perfect as well as glorious illustration of every Divine attribute—such an illustration as throughout eternity will excite our admiration, our humility, our gratitude, and our love.

II. I proceed, therefore, to consider the second topic which the text suggests, viz. *the peculiar relation* in which the saints in glory stand to God, and He to them. “They shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”

“*They shall be his people.*”—We understand the distinction conferred upon the Israelites in being called the people of God. But we know also that their obstinacy and disobedience prevented the full enjoyment of their privileges. We therefore cannot derive from their history a just idea of the happiness of a people whom the Lord would delight to honour. Neither can we be adequately enlightened on this point by what may be observed of the dealings of God with even the best and most faithful members of his church militant here on earth. For they are all imperfect, all tainted with corruption—and therefore subject to discipline for their improvement and correction. They are indeed the people of God; but they are like the child of a prince who, being yet in a state of tuition, enjoys little of the distinction belonging to his birth. We may, however, learn, in some degree, from the tendency of God’s present dispensations how hon

ourable and blessed will be the final state of his people. It was evidently his intention, by separating them from the world, to exalt their character, to purify their nature; to deliver them from every evil, to assimilate them to himself, to glorify them with himself, and fix them in a higher state of being.—In heaven they will be his people, not merely by receiving protection from him, for there will there be no enemies to fear; not merely by the service they will render, for the Creator will not need the services of any creature; but they will be his, by receiving the most abundant communications of his grace and mercy;—they will be his, by being glorified and blessed with himself. They will be manifested to be his, by partaking of the moral excellencies of his nature, and by the perfection of their felicity. They shall bear to him the relation of children, and he shall stand to them in that of a Father. He shall love them with affection worthy of himself, perfect and unchangeable: and they shall love him with an ardour in some degree proportioned to his excellence, and to the greatness of his mercies. He shall bestow on them the riches of his grace; and they return the service of an obedience pure, and perfect, and of praises grateful, fervent, and unceasing.

But that this conformity between man and God may take place, a previous change in the character of man is necessary. The change begins in the present world. Here the seed is sown which springs up into immortal life; and here the holy influence of the Spirit is imparted. The corruption of human nature shall be finally extinguished by death; and that original state of purity in which man was created shall be restored through Jesus Christ, who is “the resurrection and the life.” “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.” As they shall enter heaven with a glorified body, “like unto his body,” so

shall they possess a soul purified and sanctified by conformity to his image, and no longer blinded by ignorance or enslaved by sin. They shall know the inestimable privileges to which they are called. No guilt shall cause them to hide themselves, like Adam, from his presence. They shall love their God, whose perfections they will understand; and they shall love all his precepts, the excellency of which they can now clearly discern. This, my brethren, is the distinguishing glory of heaven; not merely that it is a scene of unspeakable happiness, but the scene of a transformation so glorious, a transformation by which we receive a nature perfectly holy, and an understanding able to comprehend true goodness, and illuminated with Divine wisdom, to appreciate the evil of sin and the excellency of righteousness. Yes; there the will is rectified, as well as the judgment; the affections are purified and confined to proper objects; no longer will there be a struggle between inclination and duty.

But while I have been speaking on this subject, you have already, I trust, anticipated me in looking to that adorable person by whom this great change is accomplished. Let not the Son of God be ever forgotten while we think or speak of heaven. He purchased us by his precious blood;—he sought us when we had wandered far from our Father's fold. To his humility, and patience, and loving-kindness, we owe every hope in time and eternity. He therefore is called the Light of Heaven. He is the bond of union between us and his Father; between the redeemed and their God. Behold here the perfect accomplishment of his labours. For this he "travailed," and suffered death on the cross, that he might thus restore men to God, and reconcile God to man; that a blessed, holy, and eternal relation might thenceforwards subsist between them; "he in them, and they in him, that they all might be one with God," one as Christ is one with the Father. Behold, my brethren, what is the "hope of

your calling, and what the riches of the glory of the inheritance of Christ in his saints."

III. After the contemplation of such a relation between God and man, we shall not be surprised at the *third* particular which our text suggests to our consideration; namely, the new circumstances into which the blessed will be introduced, so totally unlike those in which we are here placed. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."

How glorious a state! to be delivered from every evil; to be freed for ever from pain, from sorrow, from crying, and from death! What a field for our reflection! The causes of evil must, in the change which will take place, be removed: The evils under which we suffer here, arise from the just punishment of the Almighty, from the corruption of our own minds, and from the disordered state of the world. But all these sources of evil will for ever be done away. The justice of God will be satisfied, and his displeasure against us be for ever forgotten. Our own minds being perfectly pure, their inward tranquillity cannot be disturbed; and all around us participating in this holy nature will be disposed to contribute to our happiness. Oh, glorious state! where sin shall never disturb the peace of the breast; where passion and resentment shall never ruffle the mind; where pride shall never instil a vain conceit of ourselves; where jealousy shall never lead us astray, nor temptations seduce us from the path of duty. O happy state! in which pure benevolence shall expand every bosom, in which fervent love shall dictate every action, in which the causes of sorrow shall disappear. In this world, alas! even good men are too often suspicious of each other, and discern such failings and imperfection in themselves, and in their neighbours, as check the

full exercise of Christian love. But there, all shall love their neighbour as themselves, and love God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength. O blessed state! in which no enemy shall alarm, and no voice of threatening or violence shall ever be heard; in which no fear of danger or apprehension of change shall ever for a moment disturb the general tranquillity and joy; in which a weak and corrupt body shall no longer be the burthen of the soul; in which sickness shall no more impede us in the discharge of our duties, or death separate us from those we love.

But I hasten to the improvement of this important subject. And here I would beg leave to offer one important reflection, arising from a review of all the particulars which we have collected respecting heaven; namely, that it is only the amplification and perfection of that holiness continually inculcated in Scripture as our duty and principal source of enjoyment here. Heaven ought to be considered rather in the light of a state than a place, and its happiness as arising chiefly from the right views and right dispositions of all that enjoy it. This consideration is important, because it teaches us, that heaven may be begun below; that all the rudiments of heaven may be found on earth; that here may its happiness be in a measure enjoyed; that consequently, when God enjoins holiness, he enjoins happiness; that when he gives grace, he gives what may expand itself into heaven; that grace, therefore is the most valuable gift of God; that the pursuit of holiness is the highest, most honourable, and most beneficial pursuit of man; that, on the other hand, sin is misery and death, involving in it all the rudiments of hell; that hell is the full prevalence, the universal practice, the unrestrained love, of sin.

If this statement be true, so far from religion being, what it is often represented to be, gloom and melancholy, it is life, and peace, and heaven.

For what, let me ask, have we ascertained heaven to be? To dwell in heaven is to enjoy the presence of God, as manifested in the display of his glorious perfections. It is the contemplation of those perfections; the full manifestation of that wisdom, power, goodness, and glory which is the basis of the blessedness of heaven. And what is religion on earth but the display of the Divine Perfections, as manifested in the revelation given to us in the Gospel? By this we learn, how infinitely wise, and good, and gracious, is our heavenly Father. And holiness is nothing but the dispositions which are correspondent to this display; the meek resignation to the will of God; the filial dread of the displeasure of so just and holy a Being; the perfect veneration and love of Him whose majesty and goodness are infinitely great; the purity of heart and the unlimited obedience which are justly due to so perfect a Being and so righteous a sovereign.—All that we shall know of God in heaven, we know in part here, from the revelation of the Gospel. All the dispositions which are felt in heaven are, in a measure, felt upon earth by those who are truly righteous. All the enjoyments of heaven are begun here in the breasts of the faithful—the entire acquiescence in the appointments of the Almighty; the delightful confidence in his power and grace; the perfect peace and tranquillity which arise from the sense of his protection and love.

In like manner does the happiness of heaven arise from the peculiar relation in which the glorified spirits stand to God, and God to them. The very same relation subsists here below. God is the God of those who know and serve him. He is their Father and their friend; and they are his in a peculiar sense. He has redeemed them by the blood of his Son; he watches over them daily; he delights in them as his children; he is training them up for eternal glory.

And, finally, does the happiness of heaven arise from the new circumstances which exist there—the re-

removal of sorrow and death? That removal begins here. By the mortification of the body of sin, the source of suffering, the sting of death, is taken away. Afflictions are mitigated by Divine consolation, are supported by Divine aid, are sanctified by Divine grace. And, in proportion as we live the life of heaven below, in that proportion shall we rise superior to the evils of this transitory world, and enjoy the peace which passeth all understanding.

My dear friends, the practical belief of *this* truth is worth the whole world. It would be heaven to you. O let me persuade you to open the rich sources of enjoyment which are contained in the Scriptures, and to pursue the track which is there marked out as leading to heaven! It is pointed out to you by the finger of God himself. Will you refuse to follow his guidance? Does He not know the sources of true happiness? Does not He who created heaven know the elements of which it is composed? Fix this truth, then, indelibly in your minds. Whilst you pursue a course of religion and holiness, you are in the road to heaven. Heaven is already beginning to dawn upon your minds. How should this consideration reconcile us to the difficulties and obstacles which, in this evil world and with this corrupt nature, we may expect to encounter! How should it reconcile us to the self denial which at first it may be necessary to endure! Oh, look forward to the end! Behold the glorious prize proposed to you. Consider who is your Conductor, and to what place he is conducting you. And may your God be with you, and make darkness light before you, till he brings you to his own blessed seats above!

It is, however, with pain that I address myself to some of those who now surround me. Alas! I much fear that many who are now hearing, and perhaps with pleasure of the glorious state of those who are admitted into heaven, are not so living as to enjoy a well founded hope of that felicity. For the same Scrip-

tures which reveal the happiness of heaven, as explicitly declare that no impenitent sinner shall find admission there. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, no fornicator, or adulterer, or unclean person shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ." "Upon the wicked, God will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest." This shall be their portion: how different from that which we have just been contemplating!—Now may I not appeal to the consciences of some here present, that they are entitled to no part or lot in this glorious inheritance? If the wicked are excluded, *they* must be excluded. If none can "enter into the kingdom of God but those who are born again of the Spirit," they are not born again, their own consciences being their witness. If it be necessary, in order to our union with Christ, that we should here possess a true and living faith, they have no such faith, and therefore are not one with Christ, and Christ with them. In a word, if the whole tenor of Scripture declares that none are admitted into the kingdom of heaven but such as are previously fitted for it by repentance, faith, and holiness, then they stand excluded. Do not plead, in apology for yourselves, that you are not worse or more careless than others. It is true, there are many impenitent and careless. Our Saviour has said, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that enter in thereat;" and "straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to eternal life."—But while I would alarm you with a sense of your danger, I would also beseech you to reflect, that it is not yet too late, though you know not how soon it may be. Blessed be God, the door of mercy is still open. By all the unspeakable joys which I have attempted to represent, by all the terrors of everlasting destruction which cannot be described, I beseech you, then, remain not in a state of sin, or even of doubt concerning your salvation.

Christ freely offers it to you. Do not suffer so great and glorious a treasure to be lost because you will not accept it. This "day, while it is called to-day," reflect seriously upon the world to come,—think of the blessedness of dying in the Lord, of being admitted into heaven, of the misery of perishing for ever; and may the Lord give you repentance and true conversion! *Amen.*

SERMON V.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S OFFICE AND PREACHING, AS COMPARED WITH THOSE OF THE APOS- TLES AND PROPHETS.

Matt. xi. 7—15.

And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes, concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily, I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence; and the

violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John: and, if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

JOHN the Baptist, a man formed and fitted by Divine power for the high office of a reformer of the Jews, and an immediate forerunner of the Messiah, preached with so much energy and zeal that multitudes went from all parts into the wilderness to hear him, and to receive baptism from his hands. Such was his intrepidity that he openly reprov'd even the monarch on his throne; who bowed before the authoritative severity of his rebuke. Yet in the very midst of his services, when he seem'd a fit instrument to convert the whole nation to the fear of God, and effectually prepare them for the reception of the Messiah, he is apprehended by Herod, cast into prison, and there consigned to obscurity.

In the mean time, our blessed Saviour proceeds in his ministry, without seeming to recollect that his forerunner was immured in prison. He commissions twelve of his disciples to be his Apostles, to attend his person, and to preach his Gospel: but the name of John is not inserted in the number. He exercises Divine power, but not for his benefit who had so faithfully proclaimed him as the long-expected Messiah. Surely he who could expel Satan from the demoniacs, and who could give sight to the blind, could, by a word, have opened the prison doors which detained his faithful messenger, broken his chains in pieces, and spread dismay or death amongst his guards. Such an exertion of Divine power was probably expected, both by John and by his disciples; but it was expected in vain, till John, harassed with doubt, respecting the motives of his conduct, at length sends two of his disciples to remind the Messiah of his forerunner, and to inquire, "Art thou he who should come, or do we look for another?" The question was one which evidently impli-

ed some failure of faith, or rather perhaps of resignation. But whose faith would not have failed, after such expectation and under such circumstances? Our Lord appeals to the miracles which he was performing as clearly manifesting him to be the true Messiah, and then sends a gentle but merited rebuke to John for his want of proper confidence in him: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

But while he justly, though delicately, reproved the want of faith in the Baptist, it was far from his purpose to lower in the eyes of the multitude either the character of that holy man or the dignity of his office. He speaks of him, therefore, in just and high terms. "As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" That is, a man of an unstable, cowardly, and temporising disposition? The question implies a strong negation holding up to just admiration the invincible courage, the stedfast adherence to principle, the undaunted zeal for truth which characterized John. "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?" A man of luxurious habits and effeminate manners, voluptuous and self-indulgent: intimating that the character of John was a noble contrast to that of persons of this description; that he was a man of austere habits, of plain simple manners, of mortification and self-denial. It is in kings' houses, and not in the desert, that effeminacy and splendour prevail. "But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea I say unto you, and more than a prophet."—A prophet is one of the highest characters in the church. A prophet is a person commissioned by God to deliver his will to man. He is one visited by the Divine presence, armed with the Divine authority, often one endued with Divine power. Elisha was a prophet, at whose command the heavens ceased to rain for three years; at whose prayer the heavens poured forth again copious streams of rain. At his word the sick were healed, and the dead were

raised to life again. When John, therefore, was declared by our Lord to be a prophet, he was pronounced to be one of the most exalted characters upon earth, the most honoured by the Lord of Hosts, the most revered amongst men; but he was not only a prophet, but even more than a prophet. "For this is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist. Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven" (*i. e.* in the new dispensation of the Messiah) "is greater than he."—These words do not at all relate to the moral or private character of John the Baptist. Our Lord did not mean to institute a comparison between him, in his personal character, and the ancient prophets. Whether any of them was more eminent for piety than John, or whether he excelled them, is beyond the scope of our Lord's discourse. Nor was it intended to compare John, in this respect, with any of the Christian Church. Doubtless there have been many in the Christian Church, and those not amongst the least in that dispensation, who have been far inferior to John in the purity of their lives. But this is not the point of consideration. Nor does our Lord appear to compare John with the ancient prophets, or with the apostles, in respect to the variety and extent of heavenly gifts. John wrought no miracle; but the ancient prophets performed many; and some that were least in the kingdom of heaven may have wrought still more. John foretold no future events; but the ancient prophets, as well as some of the Apostles delivered many striking predictions. We must, therefore, understand our Lord to speak of John solely in his official character as the forerunner of the Messiah. In this respect he was superior to the prophets, but inferior to the apostles. The ancient prophets were honourable in proportion to the distinctness with which, while involved in distance and obscurity, they saw the day of Christ ap-

proaching, and prophesied of him as of the Light of the world, the Saviour of mankind, the glory and ornament of our race, the well beloved of the Father. John was greater still than they, because he was more immediately the forerunner of the Messiah, the messenger sent to proclaim his actual presence, and one who had the honour of introducing him into his public ministry, and of announcing him to the world as its Redeemer. But though he was thus superior to all the prophets, he was, for similar reasons, inferior even to the least apostle or teacher who lived under the Gospel dispensation, after it had been fully manifested by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the least in the kingdom of heaven was able, from his superior knowledge of the design of the Messiah's mission, from his clearer perceptions of its glory, from the more ample illuminations of the Holy Spirit shed upon him, and from his more complete acquaintance with the whole Gospel-mystery, to speak more copiously, more distinctly, and more efficaciously concerning the character and office of the Messiah. "But from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is that Elias, which was to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The mission of John the Baptist formed a new æra in the Church. Till this time, the Law and the Prophets reigned. They were the only standards of truth, the depositories of all religious knowledge, the oracles of God. But now a new dispensation commenced; the kingdom of heaven, or the salvation of the Gospel, was now announced; and all men who were influenced by the preaching of John began to press into this kingdom, with an eagerness proportioned to the high value and glorious character of the object in view.

Such appears to be the meaning of the passage before us; and it suggests some useful remarks on the

peculiar nature of the mission of John, both as superior to that of the Law and the Prophets, and, at the same time, inferior to the more glorious dispensation of which it was the harbinger.

The object of the Law and the Prophets was to call men to repentance, and to urge the necessity of obedience to the law of God. They moreover bare witness to Christ, but obscurely, occasionally, and indirectly.—John also preached repentance. In this he resembled them; but he excelled them, inasmuch as he urged repentance for a particular end: he preached it as introductory to the kingdom of heaven, which was immediately to commence; that is, as a preparation for the reception of the Messiah, who was then about to be manifested. It was the purpose in view, therefore, which gave a higher value to the doctrine of repentance as preached by him, than as delivered by the Apostles. It was his more direct reference to the Saviour, which conferred a superior dignity on his mission. And, on the other hand, it was the want of a still more full, explicit, and glorious testimony of the Saviour's office, which rendered his preaching inferior to that of even the least in the kingdom of heaven, the least of the apostles or ministers of Christ.

We may deduce from this circumstance the vast importance and rich value of the Gospel. It dignifies every office connected with it, and renders the services of even its meanest ministers excellent and glorious.

What, then, is this Gospel of Christ, which spreads so far its lustre? It is the record of Jesus Christ; and it derives its glory from the dignity of him of whom it testifies, and its value from the benefits of his office. His glory, was beyond all that, till his coming, man had been ever permitted to behold. He was "the only begotten of the Father; the Lord of heaven and earth; God manifest in the flesh, by whom and for whom all things were created, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;

and he was above all things, and by him do all things consist." And his office is of inconceivable importance to us. No benefactor like him ever appeared; no one in whom the sons of men were so universally and deeply interested; no one who for them either undertook or accomplished so much. For he was, as John testified, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world." "There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby they can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ." To him give all the prophets witness, though remotely, that he is the Saviour of the world. Hence the Apostles, deeply sensible of the value of his salvation, would know nothing amongst their disciples but Jesus Christ and him crucified. Hence they counted all things but as dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Hence they gladly suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung, that they might win Christ and be found in him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of faith in Christ.

These considerations instruct us to set a most high value upon every doctrine which relates immediately to our Lord and Saviour. The divinity of his nature, the general dignity of his person, the truth of his incarnation, the atonement made for our sins by his death on the cross, the intercession which he offers up before the Father on our behalf, the necessity of a living and true faith in him, the regenerating influence of the Spirit which he sent;—all these doctrines particularly relate to Christ, these constitute the basis of his Gospel, these form the hopes of the faithful, these are the glory of the Christian dispensation.

But let us not rest in a bare assent to these doctrines. It is the application of them to ourselves and to our own state which renders them truly valuable. When rightly used, they are the power of God unto salvation. But to produce this effect, they must be believed with the heart, they must become principles of action: we must learn from them to look continually to our Sav-

jour with true faith, to receive him as our Prophet and Teacher, as our Advocate and Intercessor, as our Lord and King. The mere speculative belief of the doctrines of the Gospel, the simple acknowledgement of their truth, and even of their importance, is of little value. It is their influence on our hearts which alone constitutes their utility to us. And this influence must be supreme and continual: it must not only give life to our daily devotions, but it must reach our affections; it must be the spring by which we act in all the daily concerns of life. The power of the Gospel must be paramount. It is an inconsistency to suppose that it can exist in a divided heart. If not supreme, it is nugatory. Its very use consists in the subjugation of those principles which would dispute its sway. It exists in order to extirpate them: it lives for their destruction.

The preaching of John the Baptist was, in a great degree, austere and rigid. He himself retired to the desert: he was clad in the coarsest garments; he ate the plainest food. His disciples fasted frequently. He inculcated the necessity of mortification, self-denial and repentance; at the same time directing the minds of his disciples to Him who was to come, the latchet of whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose.

The religion of many Christians is of a similar cast with that of John the Baptist, and this both among Protestants and Catholics. They do not entirely exclude the Saviour from their system; neither did the Baptist; but like him they make the most prominent of their doctrines those of repentance, mortification, and self-denial. But this is not the true system. It has not a sufficiently evangelical cast. The religion of John was superseded by that of Christ; and the character of Christ's religion was different from that of John. It was a religion of hope, of peace, of joy. It was "glad tidings of great joy; glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will towards man." The effect it had on those who received it was to fill them

with joy and peace in believing. This marked distinction of character was visible whilst our Lord was on earth, and formed a subject of remark and of reproach to Christ. But it was still more striking when his gospel came to be more generally and thoroughly understood; I mean, after his ascension.

I do not say that the doctrines of repentance, of mortification, and self-denial, were not parts, and important parts, of the religion of Christ, but only that they were not the most prominent and characteristic. They were rather means to a higher end, that of enjoying, through the all-sufficiency of Christ, a peace, and hope, and purity, which mitigated the severities of the former repentance and self-denial. They were the rudiments in the school of Christ: but something higher was to be learned, something nobler to be obtained. The Baptist preached repentance as a preparation for him who should come: his disciples were baptized with the baptism of repentance, in order that they might afterwards believe in Him who was to baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire; but when he came, John's mission was superseded, and the minds of his disciples, having been prepared by repentance and contrition, were turned to Him who taketh away the sins of the world. While these doctrines hold the same order and place with us, they are highly useful. Let our conversion begin with the deepest penitence, with resolute mortification and rigid self-denial, but let it not end there: these must lead us on to Christ, to rest on him who taketh away our sins. We are the disciples of Christ, not of Moses or the Baptist. They did but point to Christ, and direct the mind to him.

Yet here let me caution you, on the other hand, not to oppose the doctrines of John to those of Christ — The doctrines which John preached were a proper preparation to those of Jesus. They formed a basis on which the others were to rest. The disciples of John, having learnt what he inculcated, were prepared to receive Christ. The good seed was received into

ground fitted for it. Nor did the Seventy Disciples when sent out to preach use a different language. They preached every where, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Nor did the Apostles, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the descent of the Holy Ghost, deviate from the same doctrine. They testified "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." Thus also our Lord enjoined the practice of self-denial: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man deny not himself, he cannot be my disciple." And the Apostle inculcated mortification: "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth." These important duties are not therefore in opposition to the Christian system: they are not contrary to it; they are actually parts of it, and must be scrupulously attended to; but they are only subservient, and therefore must not be proposed as the whole end in view.

Successive ages have had their different errors. And if the retirement, the penance, the fasting of former periods have passed away, let us beware lest the substantial parts of Christianity, of which they were the symbols, do not vanish also. In the present age, the chief danger is lest our hope should be too readily indulged, our peace too slightly founded, our joy too little connected with holiness; and lest repentance, and self-denial, and mortification should be renounced as remnants of Judaism or of Popery, instead of being cherished as important and necessary branches of the Christian system.

The upright heart, a sincere devotedness to God, a supreme love of holiness, an earnest desire to be conformed to the image of Christ will carry us safely through all perils. They will teach repentance, by manifesting its necessity; they will inculcate self denial, by shewing the danger of self-indulgence; and they will suggest mortification as the necessary means of purifying our hearts. At the same time, we shall learn to trust in Him who alone is able to save to the utter-

most those that come to God by him. We shall adore his grace, magnify his love, and experience peace and joy in believing.

With these high sentiments of Christ, with these just views of the nature of his Gospel, let us welcome his advent, and rejoice in the symbols of his love set before us. Let us, while we "behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world," unite all the reverent awe, the deep humiliation, the holy self-denial of the disciples of the Baptist, with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Let us approach his table with trembling hope and humble gratitude, whilst we receive the benefits of that salvation which fills all heaven with wonder, and all the earth with gladness. Let us push with holy violence into the kingdom of heaven, for "the violent take it by force." The languid endeavour, the heartless prayer, the formal worship, the cold acknowledgment, are unworthy of the Saviour who is given to us, and of the blessings which we derive from him. May God impart to us such sensations as become the subject and the occasion, that, with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven, we may laud and magnify his glorious name; evermore praising him, and saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of thy glory."

SERMON VI.

ON THE NATURE AND END OF LIFE.

James iv. 14.

What is your life?

OF all misapprehensions, none are more dangerous, because none are likely to have a more extensive and constant effect, than those which relate to the nature, the end, and the proper objects of life. They influence the conduct not merely in some particular relation, or with respect to some individual duty, but in reference to every relation and every duty; for the whole course of human action is intimately connected with a just view of the real nature and design of life. It will not therefore be useless to direct our thoughts in such a train as may enable us to form correct ideas upon this momentous subject. In order to do this, it will be necessary first to notice the mistakes which prevail respecting the nature of life.

It is not intended, as many seem to suppose, to be a scene of enjoyment. I say, it is not *intended*; for the clue which should guide us in all our inquiries on this, and indeed on every subject, is the Divine intention. The question is not, what life is to any proposed indi-

vidual: for in judging of this, our conceptions will vary with the particular circumstances of the case, or with our peculiar views and feelings; and, in one instance, it will be pronounced to be a state of great misery; in another, of great happiness; and thus a contradictory judgment of life in general would be formed: but the true state of the question is, What did our Creator intend it to be to his creatures? Now to this it may be answered, that he certainly did not intend it to be directly and principally a scene of enjoyment. Notwithstanding the comforts of life, far exceeding as they do what could reasonably have been expected, and demanding our most grateful acknowledgments, consider the constant occurrence and universal extension of human calamity and disappointment, and the law of mutual dependence, by which those evils are so strikingly multiplied and ensured. Examine the texture of our bodies, so frail and subject to disease; and even the construction of our minds, liable as they are to humiliating infirmities and corroding passions; and it will be very evident, that a world so constituted could not have been primarily or mainly designed as a state of happiness. Now if this be really the case, how exceedingly mistaken are those who are expecting to make or to find it a state of that description! Yet this is the mistake of a majority of mankind. Happiness is their chief, almost their exclusive object. This they pursue in infancy, in youth, in maturity, in old age; and though, in general, it continues perpetually to elude their grasp, yet with an unremitting ardour they are ever renewing the pursuit; sometimes varying the path of search, but never abandoning the object. Yet surely wisdom should be learned from these disappointments, which should suggest, to those who have experienced them, the question, whether earthly happiness ought to be their chief object; whether it is that which God intended his creatures to pursue; whether it is attainable. Nor are these questions less necessary to such as are yet young, and whose hopes from life are

still very sanguine. If they have not yet learned the lesson from their own experience, let them at least give credit to the assurance, that man is in this world but in the midst of his journey; and that his home, his rest, his scene of enjoyment, is to be expected only in a future state of existence.

It is an error equally injurious, on the other hand, to suppose that life is a source of unmixed vexation and misery. "Man is," indeed, born "to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" and this world is in a fallen state, and "under the curse" of its Creator; but it is not a place of punishment. The goodness of God has been gloriously displayed in it, and there is not a creature living who does not largely partake of that goodness. Though enjoyment, therefore, as distinct from the performance of his duties, ought not to be his object, yet in the way of duty a man may humbly hope for and expect happiness. He may hope to share in the general bounty of his heavenly Father; and particularly, he both may and ought to expect that happiness which arises immediately from right dispositions and views of mind, and from upright and conscientious conduct. A gloomy frame of mind is not only destructive of happiness, but is highly injurious to the goodness of our heavenly Father, whose mercies are over all his works, and who hath given to us in Christ all things richly to enjoy.

When the inquiry is made, What is our life? let us always remember that it is not a permanent state. This will be allowed by all, and yet its necessary consequences are practically denied. How readily is it acknowledged, that life is merely a vapour, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away! And yet how continually do men act as if, with respect to themselves at least, it were eternal! They cherish no ideas of happiness in any other state; they contrive intricate and protracted designs, which will require years for their execution, forgetting that they may not live to

complete a single plan, that they cannot insure the enjoyment of a single day.

Notwithstanding, however, the shortness and uncertainty of life, such persons would be acting right to make the best of it, provided that this were the only state of existence: but since the life to come is as infinitely long as this is short, no words can describe the folly of those who, wholly engrossed by the transitory objects of this world, make no provision for another.

In considering the question, What is life? great caution should be used not to confound it with mere animal life.—It is necessary for our subsistence, in the present state of things, that we should eat, and drink, and sleep, and that we should labour to procure food and clothing; for these things are the support of animal life; but our life, in its proper sense, is a very different thing from these. It cannot consist in that which is shared in common with the brutes. No: man was born for a higher kind of existence; his faculties are of a nobler cast. Life with him should be something more intellectual, more spiritual, and should denote a being of a higher order. To live, is not merely to exist; it is to fulfil purposes more noble, and to enjoy pleasures more exalted. We do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the soul of man. The soul of man is the man himself: the body is the incumbrance of the soul, the prison within which it is confined. He who is pampering the body, or solicitous only about sensual pleasures, is like a prisoner who spends his life in dressing and adorning his chains, and has forgotten the enjoyment and the desire of liberty.

When it is inquired, What is life? we should take care not to confound it with the circumstances of life.—Life and its circumstances are very different things, which yet are too frequently mistaken for each other. Life, strictly speaking, is independent of adverse or prosperous events, of toil or ease, of rank or station, of persons or places. All these things we are too apt

closely to connect with life by artificial associations, so that it is made to depend almost entirely upon them. But the words of Scripture are very important, and ought to be well weighed by us: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." A man may be living, in the noblest sense of the word, who, like Lazarus, is destitute of all things: a man may have the highest enjoyment of life, who, like Paul and Silas, is shut up in a dungeon and bound with chains. Now the grand mistake of the world is, that they consider the animal part of life as life itself, and the circumstances relating to that part as essential to life. They spend all their time, and give up the whole of their attention and talents, to obtain full provision for this miserable, perishing body. Often it perishes before they have procured what they think a provision for it; and often, when they have procured this provision, the body is too far exhausted to enjoy it. Oh when will men learn to make the important distinction, that life is something entirely independent of those circumstances with which it is so generally confounded!

What, then, is life? May God, the Author and Giver of life, grant that I may present so just and true a view of it, that it may be your wish and determination to live according to the wise and gracious designs of your Creator!

To answer this question aright, we must look back to the creation of mankind. While Adam continued in his innocence, life and enjoyment were inseparably connected. Life was a scene of happiness, and heaven and earth ministered to it abundantly. The occupations of life and its enjoyments went hand in hand. The object of the one was to glorify God, and to obey the most indulgent of Parents; the other consisted in holding communion with him, and in receiving with gratitude the abundance of his mercies. Alas! the scene is now changed: a fatal alteration has been made in our former condition. Yet it will be highly useful

to us, in determining what our life should now be, always to hold up this former condition to our view. that, beholding life in its best form, we may endeavour to assimilate the present state of existence as much as possible to that perfect model. When man forfeited his original happiness, he and the world in which he dwelt fell under the frown and curse of the Almighty. God, however, in infinite mercy, did not leave him in that state. Of his great goodness he was pleased to promise him a Redeemer; and thus the sentence of destruction was suspended, and he was placed in a middle state between hopeless despair and pure enjoyment. He was neither treated as a son of God, nor entirely as an outcast from him: but was rendered capable of being restored, even while on earth, in some imperfect measure, to the Divine favour and blessing, and of becoming an heir of the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand he might become so degenerate, as to be only more and more meet for destruction, till at length he should be irrecoverably consigned to it.

Such being the present condition of man, we may consider the nature of his life with reference either to its occupations or its enjoyments.

1. With reference to its *occupations*—It is manifest that they ought chiefly to refer to the recovery of the favour of God, and the acquisition of eternal blessings. —Here is set before us a most noble object; an object of such magnitude, that every thing else shrinks into nothing before it. That object is eternal life. Let us contemplate it a moment. It is a life which will endure through countless millions of ages, without decay or possibility of diminution. It is a life spent in the region of perpetual happiness. It is a life of perfect purity, unsullied by any thing sinful or degrading; a life free from every evil, and enriched with every enjoyment which the wisdom or the power of God can communicate.

Behold here the true idea of life: this *is* life: to live in heaven, is to live indeed. If from a scene so glori-

ous we turn our eyes to the present state of existence, how clearly does it appear that the proper pursuit of this life is to obtain a participation of the exalted felicity to be enjoyed in heaven! To this all our anxiety should be directed; in this all our cares should centre. Every other object is comparatively nothing.

Now it is the design of God to bring those that truly receive the Gospel of his Son to eternal life; and he has been pleased to appoint this life as a suitable preparation for that blessed state. Here, then, light breaks in upon us with respect to the true nature and design of our situation in this world. We are placed here as in a school, and have important lessons to learn, and weighty duties to fulfil. One lesson which we have to learn, is the true state of man. By nature we are proud, and entertain high thoughts of our present merits and future destinies. But as it is impossible that we can be really happy unless our views are according to truth, so it is absolutely necessary that we should learn to think rightly of ourselves; to see that we are really in a degraded, abject, and miserable state.—a state which has excited the compassion of God, and which should excite in us sentiments of the deepest humiliation.

Now, when this state of man is thoroughly known, the great business of life is to procure its remedy. To remain in such a condition is death; and it is an object worthy of all the exertions of an immortal soul to escape from it. Now, in order that we may be enabled to do this, God has been pleased to send his beloved Son into the world, and has communicated to us, in the Gospel the nature, and method of his salvation. We *live* while we seek to know Christ, “whom to know is everlasting life.” We live while we are studying his word, or lifting up our hearts in prayer to him. We live while we are struggling to subdue the body of sin; while we are endeavouring to mortify our selfishness, our sensuality, our worldiness and evil passions. We live, in the proper sense of the word, when we are

partakers of the Holy Spirit, and become subject to his gracious influence. Life, therefore is a death to sin and a new birth to righteousness.

Another lesson which we have to learn here, is the knowledge of God;—the knowledge of him as he is in himself, and as he stands related to us: that he may appear to us altogether glorious, the object of fear, veneration, hope, trust, love, and delight.—All happiness, all glory, all excellence, being derived immediately from God, it is very evident that we should seek from him all that we need to enrich and bless us. At the Fall, man departed from God, and sought for happiness independently of his Creator. The restoration of true life, therefore, consists in returning to God: in learning submission to his will, and obedience to his commands; that God may be all, and man nothing; that the will of God may be done supremely, and man have no will or desire but his. Then we employ life properly, when it is occupied in thus glorifying God and ascribing to him the honour due to his name.

The true employment, then, of life, should consist in these three particulars;—in endeavouring to know ourselves, to extricate ourselves from our present fallen state, and to know and serve God. And every event in life should be viewed, and every business in life performed, with reference to our improvement in these three great points.

Let us exemplify this in the common occurrences of the world. Let us imagine to ourselves a real Christian, entertaining these just views of life, and see how he brings them into practice.—Does he meet with adverse circumstances? He reflects that they are of God's appointment, and he strives to bring his heart to a state of holy resignation.—Does it please God to send him prosperity? He checks his expectations from it: he considers of how little importance is all terrestrial good; and he does not suffer it to take too strong a hold on his affections.—Is he ill treated? He calls to mind the example of his blessed Lord; and endeavours like him,

to bear opposition and injury, not only without resentment; but with real forgiveness.—Is he caressed by the world? He is on his guard against this dangerous source of temptation, and seeks to derive his satisfaction from the favour of God only.—Is he engaged in business? Though it is his duty to be diligent, he is upon his guard lest he should be too much immersed in it; and finds additional cause to watch his heart, lest the love of the world should obtain dominion over him. These instances will be sufficient to shew that a real Christian always bears in mind his true state; as a poor sinful creature, who is merely passing through this evil world, which he knows to be full of dangers, to a better; and who is seeking to approve himself to his great Master, and to be made “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

2. But life may be justly considered in reference to *enjoyment* as well as to occupation.

Now, in considering what is the proper enjoyment of life, we should contemplate, as before, the life eternal in heaven, for that is the archetype of all true life here below. Enjoyment in heaven is derived from communion with God, adoration of his perfections, and obedience to his will; and from the very same sources must our happiness here also be derived. We *live*, then, while with bended knees, we prostrate ourselves, before the Father of spirits, implore his grace, and adore his mercy. We live, whilst, beholding the earth replenished with the goodness of the Lord, we receive his mercies with praise and thanksgiving. We live, while we contemplate, with gratitude to God, the mercies of redeeming love, and anticipate the joyful day when we shall cast ourselves at the Saviour's feet, and enter into his joy. True happiness is derived from the knowledge of Christ, from confidence in the Divine promises, from the exercise of faith and hope in God, from the faithful discharge of duty, from the contemplation of a blessed and glorious immortality.

The true nature of life, in its occupations and enjoyments, having been thus considered, it may here be remarked, that this view, if fully carried into practice, would entirely change the pursuits of far the greatest part of mankind. I do not mean that it would change their employments, but their objects. It would abate their ardour, with respect to things which now appear of the first importance, and make them much more earnest with respect to objects now seldom in their thoughts. The man of business now rises early, and goes to his employment with his whole soul engrossed with it; he calls himself happy when his business prospers, and unfortunate when it does not succeed; while perhaps he scarcely gives a thought to the life to come. But were he to adopt the views which have been here developed he would pause in the morning ere he plunged into the vortex of business: he would consider the welfare of his soul as far more important than that of his body; he would, therefore, first, in the most serious manner, prostrate himself before God, and earnestly seek for right principles and a right frame of mind to carry him through the day. He would then enter upon his duties as upon occasions of trial, whereby his dispositions were to be exercised, the state his mind ascertained, and his improvement in grace promoted. His conduct throughout the day, the manner in which he would pursue his business, would shew a mind deeply penetrated with eternal things. Thus he would make the present life, what it ought to be, a school of preparation for the life to come.

It remains now to improve this subject to our more immediate benefit.

I shall first address myself to the Young.—To them I would say: You are just entering upon life, perhaps with very sanguine hopes and expectations from it. But have you taken into your calculation its true nature? Have you considered that life must be only what God has been pleased to make it;—that you cannot be happy without him; and that he ordains this

life to be a state of trial for his people? This reflection may serve in some measure, to check your eagerness; but I must further remind you, that God gave you life to be employed, perhaps, in very different pursuits from those in which you may have intended to occupy it. And have you considered that he will one day call you to account for the manner in which, and the objects for which, you live? Be assured you are continually observed by him: his eye is ever upon you; and probably he may often thwart your expectations, in order to remind you that there is a Superior Power, who does and will control you. You think, perhaps, that when you grow older you will be more religious: at present, you wish to try the world, and to take your share of its pleasures. Now this reasoning is built upon the supposition that God will spare your life to be old. But have you any reason to believe this? Do you not see the young cut down in the midst of their days, in order that those who are spared may learn to fear God and trifle no longer? God measures life not by years, but by improvement. Let me advise you, in the schemes which you may form of life, to ask yourself, *What was the kind of life which my Creator intended me to pursue?* For, be assured you can never prosper by deviating from his will. If you try the rash experiment, you will, sooner or later, be compelled to own how foolish and miserable they are who depart from him.

But, above all, ye men of business, whose hearts are engrossed with the world, *What is your life?* You are earnestly employed in making provision for the body, but what have you done for your souls? Have you been living, in the sense in which God estimates life? Have you made it your chief business to know and serve him, and to mortify your corrupt nature, and to make use of this life as a scene of preparation for the life to come? There is danger in too intense application to business, that it may leave the mind unfit for more serious employments; it is, therefore, absolutely necessary that you

should be deeply convinced of the infinite superiority of spiritual and eternal things to those of time and sense. It is necessary that such Scriptures as these should be perpetually set before you: "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." You ought often to think how soon the time will come when you will be called away; and then "whose shall those things be" which you have been seeking with so much earnestness? There is a way of being wise in the esteem of the world, but foolish in the eyes of God; of being rich in worldly goods, but poor in the sight of the Almighty. Seek, then, to obtain true wisdom; and to be rich in faith, and heirs of that kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him.

But I address many who are already beginning to descend into the vale of years.—You then must expect soon to quit this life. Suppose the time to be actually arrived, and that you are asked the question, *What hath your life on earth been?* What reply can you make to your Creator? Will you venture to say, "I have spent it in folly and sin, and in eager pursuit of the world? I never seriously thought of my soul, but always indulged myself, to the utmost of my power, in earthly enjoyments."—How many would be obliged thus to reply, if they dared to reply at all to their Judge? And thus they would be found to have neglected the very end for which they were created; to have trifled away life, which ought to have been to them an inestimable advantage; and to have lost the opportunities by which they might have gained eternal happiness. O let us frequently set before us that day of account, which cannot be far distant. Ere another year be closed, how many of those, now here in health, will be called to their final doom! "To-day, then, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

But there are many present, who, I trust, are truly, and in earnest, endeavouring to live to God. To such, this subject is indeed interesting. Let me exhort you to learn from it, to consider this life, and all its events, as of very small importance in themselves. You must learn to think less and less of the troubles and trials of life. Weigh them against eternity. These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Consider them as the appointed means of your sanctification; this will give them a dignity and excellence, which will render them not merely tolerable, but in some degree acceptable. They bring forth the fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.—Look also on the present life as merely a state of infancy. What are eighty or a hundred years, in the comparison with a million of ages? Or what the evanescent pleasures of this world, when opposed to the never-ending enjoyments of the life to come?—Learn also to estimate every thing by a spiritual standard. That is the true view of life which teaches you to consider it as consisting in holiness: Accustom yourself, then, to look upon death in a different point of view from that in which it appears to the world. Consider it as the beginning of life, the æra of new hopes and more exalted happiness.—And, finally, my beloved brethren, endeavour to improve the present span of existence. It is, indeed, very short; but every day is big with importance, when you consider its possible effects. Every day gives in its account: and happy are they who are found consecrating it to God, and living as he would have his creatures employed,—to his glory, and their own eternal benefit.

SERMON VII.

DEFICIENCY OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.

Matth. v. 20.

I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

THE example of others may be of material benefit to us, if we use it in order to excite a greater abhorrence of evil, or to animate our ardour in the pursuit of good. Thus the example of the transgressing Israelites in the wilderness is set before us by the Apostle: "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Now all these things happened unto them for examples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." On the other hand the example is presented to us of those who through faith and patience have inherited the promises. Their faith we are exhorted to imitate; and, "seeing we are encom-

passed with so great a cloud of witnesses," we are to "lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us."

In allowing, however, that both good and evil example may be of the highest utility, it is pre-supposed that we fully understand what is evil and what is good. This knowledge being obtained, the experience of others may be made subservient to the purpose of strengthening our dread of that which is evil, and our attachment to that which is good. But example is often lamentably misapplied; it becomes the subject of blind and indiscriminate imitation; and fallible man is made the standard of faith and practice, instead of the word of God. This is what our Saviour has forbidden: "Call no man master, for ye have one who is your master in heaven." Yet this was the fault of the Jews, and it has been the fault of every age. The Jews looked to the Scribes and Pharisees as the only teachers and models of right. They were therefore disposed to reply to our Lord, when urging more religious strictness than that to which they had been accustomed; "Our Scribes, those whose office it is to teach religion; and our Pharisees, whom we reverence as most exemplary persons; do not press upon us that inward and spiritual religion on which you insist." To this objection our Lord replies in this in this decisive manner; Whatever false teachers may affirm, or formal professors practice, I say unto you, that "except that your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is therefore important,

I. To inquire what was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees;

II. To shew wherein it was deficient, and in what quality and degree we must exceed them;

III. To impress upon our consciences the absolute necessity that our righteousness should exceed theirs, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven.

I. Let us inquire what was the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees.

The Pharisees professed greater strictness and purity in religion than the rest of their nation. They had the Law and the Prophets always before their eyes, and considered themselves bound to observe both the righteousness of the Old Testament and the traditions of the elders with the most rigid punctuality.

The Pharisees were sound in most of the *doctrinal* points of religion. They acknowledged the one true God of Israel, and were zealous in endeavouring to make proselytes to the truth. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, and in the departure of the soul to a state of happiness or misery after death.

In their observance of the *ceremonial* parts of the Law, they were not only blameless, but scrupulously exact. They paid not merely tithes of all things usually demanded, but even of the smallest herbs that grew in the garden.

In their *devotions* they were frequent. They were constant at the temple at every hour of prayer; they fasted often; and they were such strict observers of the Sabbath as to be shocked at our Lord's healing of the sick on that day, which they considered as a violation of its sanctity; and, from the same principle, we find that they were offended at his disciples for rubbing out ears of corn in their hands on the Sabbath day, as they passed through a field.

With respect to their *outward morals* also, as far as they acted according to their profession, they were blameless. And that they were, in general, free from gross and outward sins, is presumable from the reputation for religion which they possessed: for who could imagine, a society of openly licentious, intemperate, or dishonest men to be held in esteem as a religious sect? Add to this, that they seem to have been, in a measure, *charitable to the poor*. giving alms of that which they possessed.

Such were the Pharisees. And if men are thus far sound in doctrine, punctual in the performance of ceremonies, frequent in their acts of devotion, moral and charitable, how many are there amongst us who are ready to pronounce them to be proper objects of praise, and fit models for imitation!

It cannot be doubted, that amongst the Pharisees, there were many excellent persons; for a man is not to be condemned as evil merely because he was a Pharisee; we may even presume that there were few Jews of real piety who were not of that sect: nevertheless, as a body, they were most corrupt. They were the bitterest enemies of our Lord, persecuting him even to death; and the great Judge of men, who intimately knew their hearts, denounced against them the severest woes, and declared to his disciples, in the words of the text, that if their righteousness did not exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Let us examine, then,

II. In what points their righteousness was deficient, and in what respects it is necessary that we should exceed them. Upon examination, we shall find that their righteousness was defective, inasmuch as it was impure in respect to its motives, partial in its extent, and merely external.

1. It was *impure in respect to its motives*.—It is the quality of the motive which determines the quality of the action. The motive which influenced the Pharisees was the love of praise. They did every thing to be seen of men. When they gave alms, they sounded a trumpet before them: when the hour of prayer was come, they were not sorry to be surprised by it in the midst of the street, that their devotion might be the more observed: when they fasted, they put on an air of sadness, they disfigured their faces, and affected to look pale, that the world might have a high opinion of the rigour of their self-denial; their phylacteries they made broad, for the purpose of bearing upon them numerous

passages of Holy Writ. Now of what value were all their acts of devotion or charity, when they proceeded from so corrupt a principle; when they sprung from vanity, or tended to elate them with a high opinion of themselves? What were these, in the sight of God, but so many acts of sin and marks of inward corruption?

2. Their righteousness was *partial in its extent*.—No righteousness is perfect which does not comprehend every part of the duty required of us by God. A single sin cherished, a single evil temper willfully retained, taints the whole body of religion: it shews a want of sincerity. Sincerity regards the authority of the Proposer of the Law, and therefore equally reverences every precept which he has given. Now the Pharisees strictly and ostentatiously observed those commandments which cost them the least trouble; and these they taught the world to regard as the most important. They were scrupulous in their attention to the ceremonies of religion; but a large portion of the Divine precepts they utterly neglected: many a holy temper they took no pains to cultivate; they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel. Thus they neglected even the weightier matters of the law—justice and mercy—while they tithed mint, anise and cummin. While they fasted twice a week, they were void of compassion for their fellow creatures; they could see a man lying naked and wounded without relieving him, and pass on to the other side of the way. They would not touch a poor publican or sinner, lest they should be defiled; but they had no pity for his perishing soul, and used no endeavours to reclaim him. They indulged a covetous spirit without restraint, and, making long prayers, devoured widows' houses. They were eminently proud, valuing themselves and despising others. They were proud of their piety, and proud of their rank and attainments. They sought the chief seats in assemblies and entertainments. The common people they held in detestation: "Have any of the rulers and chief priests believed on him? but as for this people they are cursed."

Though they were punctual in sanctifying the Sabbath, yet light and even false swearing they freely allowed. They were notorious for their bigotry and uncharitableness, hating and persecuting, with extreme rancour, those from whom they differed. Imperfect, indeed, was that righteousness, which admitted of all this covetousness, pride, injustice, and hardness of heart.

3. But it was another characteristic of their righteousness, that it was *merely external*.—True religion resides chiefly in the heart, but false religion rests in external performances. In the righteousness of the Pharisees there was no spirituality. They endeavoured to keep within the letter of the Law; but had little regard to its spirit. Murder they would not commit, but secret resentment and an unforgiving spirit they did not regard as criminal. They admitted the duty of loving our neighbour, but restricted the term neighbour to those of their own sect; an enemy they thought it justifiable to hate. They considered adultery as a crime; but the defilement of the mind, the licentiousness of the eye, or of the heart, they did not resist. They worshipped God with external worship, but not in spirit and truth: they drew near to him with their lips, but with their hearts they were far from him. In a word, they were strangers to all that inward holiness which, in the sight of God, is of great price, and which constitutes the essence of religion; and to that poverty of spirit and contrition for sin, that meekness, that mercy, kindness, and forgiveness, that purity of heart, that hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and that heavenly-mindedness and simplicity, which Christ has represented as characteristic of the Gospel.

One striking proof of the bad quality of their religion, was their treatment of Jesus Christ. Behold the Son of God coming amongst them: pure and spotless in all things, meek and lowly in heart, full of zeal for God and love for man. What was the reception given him by these religionists? Worse, far worse, than that which he experienced from the most notorious sinners.

They reviled him; they reproached him as a devil; they abhorred him; they persecuted him incessantly; they sought with unrelenting malice to put him to death. What a proof is this of the necessity that our religion should be of a right kind! The corruption of the best things often leads to the worst consequences. A religion which is false may tend only to embolden in sin, to sear the conscience, and give additional hardness to the heart.

III. Having thus investigated the deficiency of the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall be better able to determine in what respects our righteousness should exceed theirs. We must look to its principle, to its extent, and to its nature.

1. It must be *pure in its principle*.—No desire of human reputation, no sordid love of gain, no regard to worldly interest, must be its source; nor must it be the effect of timid compliance with general custom. No: our righteousness must proceed from a deep inward sense of God's right to be obeyed, and of his being worthy to be loved. There must be a supreme desire to honour him above all things, and to fulfil his will whatever be the sacrifice. Filial fear of God, reverence for his authority, affectionate regard to his name, a full knowledge of his character and attributes; these are the foundations of true righteousness: these alone will produce an obedience pure, absolute, and unequivocal; such as is meant by the commandment "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy strength;" such as is intended by the eye being single; such as is required when it is said "Whosoever loveth father or mother, sisters, houses or land, more than me, is not worthy of me."—My brethren, is this the principle of our religion? Do we see such an amiableness in God; are we so penetrated with the thoughts of his being our Creator, our Benefactor, and our Father, that we make it our chief aim to please him? If we fail here, we want the true princi

ple of religion, and perhaps are actuated by one little better than that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

2. Let us learn also, that our righteousness *must not*, like that of the Pharisees, *be partial*.—There is an indispensable connexion between the several parts of religion; they cannot subsist independently of each other; they do not admit of any conjunction with sin. Light and darkness cannot dwell together in the same place, nor can the spirit of true grace consist with the allowed indulgence of sinful dispositions. Here, then, let us try ourselves. Have we not selected those parts of religion the practice of which is attended with the least inconvenience, while we neglect others equally important?—Tell me not that you are chaste, and sober, and honest. Are you free from pride? Are you mortifying the vanity of your mind? Are you conscientious as to the manner of employing your time? Are you watchful to do good? Are you careful to discharge the duties of your station? Do you guard against passion, against evil speaking, against feelings of resentment? Do you beware of slothfulness, and a criminal self-indulgence and love of ease?—Take the complete circle of duties, and be assured, that, if true principle inclines you to cultivate one branch of righteousness, it will equally operate to produce in you the desire to attain every other Christian grace. This remark is sanctioned by the Apostle, when he says, “Whosoever keepeth the whole law (besides) and offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all.”

3. And, further, let us remember, that *our righteousness must be spiritual* as well as external—If you worship God in the church weekly, and also daily in your family; if you give alms, read the Bible, and abstain from gross sins:—all this is well; yet these may only be external acts; these may be merely such duties as the Pharisees practised. What is the state of your heart? Are you spiritual in your views? Does the inward man partake in this holiness which is externally professed? Do you watch over your imagination?

Do you deny your appetites? Do you stifle the rising emotions of resentment and wrath? Do you resist the secret desires of the soul after wealth? Do you guard against worldliness and covetousness? Do you mortify that love of distinction and fame, which often prevails in the breast where great external modesty is affected? In a word, do you understand the purity of the commandments; not merely confining yourself to the duties specifically enjoined, but attending to the spirit of the precept, and endeavouring to possess corresponding dispositions of heart?

4. To sum up all: Is your righteousness *sincere*?—I do not speak of the perfection of its degree, but of the soundness of its quality. There may be sincerity in the youngest Christian as well as in the most experienced. Sincerity may belong to the most imperfect righteousness upon earth, as well as to the most perfect in heaven: that is, however imperfect, it may comprise a real and conscientious desire to honour God in all things; and this may evidence itself in a general respect to *all* his commandments, to internal graces as well as to external duties. In a word, the man may be inwardly what he is outwardly, and in the sight of God, what he is in the sight of man. When this is the case, a Christian's righteousness, however imperfect in degree, does still exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees.

There are many professed Christians whose righteousness, it is to be feared, does not even equal that of the Scribes and Pharisees. They do not even cover their worldliness or conceal their lusts; they do not even put on the appearance of devotion. Now these may not be guilty of hypocrisy, but they belong to a class which is even below that of the Pharisees. It resembles that of the Sadducees, who were evidently worse even than the former. How, then, can such enter into the kingdom of heaven? Alas! they stand self-condemned. Their righteousness is not of an inferior quality: they have no righteousness, nor do they pre-

tend to have any. Their condemnation, therefore, is clear; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

But there are many others who far more nearly resemble the Pharisees. These appear devout; they attend the ordinances of the Church, receive the sacrament, and give some alms to the poor; but they are, at the same time, proud, selfish, covetous, vain, idle. Their obedience is partial, external, and founded in no love of God and of Divine things, but rather in regard to the opinion of their fellow creatures, and a servile obedience to custom. To these I would say, Listen to the words of our Lord, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." What, then, is its character? Is it more pure in principle? No: it has the same principle. Is it more general? No: it is equally partial. Is it more spiritual and internal? No: it is, like theirs, external: it consists in the observance of ceremonies and outward forms. But, alas! what are these without the substance? The Scripture speaks of having the form but denying the power of godliness. And is such a righteousness sufficient? Hear, I entreat you, and engrave on your heart, the words of our Lord. He it is who shall sit upon the throne of glory, and who shall judge all men; of his words not one jot or tittle shall pass away: and he has declared, that, without a better righteousness than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, none shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: without this, ye shall in *no case enter*. God has shut up every other door: there are no possible means by which you can escape condemnation.

These expressions, my brethren, are of very awful import. May they produce the most firm conviction, that, without real holiness—a holiness not formal, partial, or corrupt, but pure, spiritual, and universal—we cannot enter into heaven. This is the declaration of Him who will be our Judge; a Judge, not severe, but

kind and compassionate, for he is also our Redeemer, who so loved us as to lay down his life for us.

To conclude: the subject which has been considered may serve, not only to shew us the vanity and uselessness of that superficial religion with which many are content, but it may remind us of the depravity and deceitfulness of the human heart, which carries insincerity into religion itself. It may also suggest to us the absolute necessity of Divine grace, to cleanse us from our sin, and to give us that entire renovation of the inward man, without which our best righteousness will not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. It may also dispose us with humility and thankfulness to embrace the offer of that salvation which has been provided for us by the Son of God;—a salvation which comprehends the gift of righteousness and true holiness, as well as the pardon of every past offence. Let it then lead us to seek, in the fulness of Christ, these blessings, of which we stand so greatly in need.

SERMON VIII.

COMPARISON OF THE JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN DISPENSATIONS.

Heb. xii. 22—24.

But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven; and to God, the Judge of all; and to the Spirits of just men made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

IN this passage of Scripture the Apostle is comparing the Jewish and Christian dispensations. He is exhorting the Hebrews to bear cheerfully and courageously all the sufferings which they might encounter for their adherence to the Christian faith; and, amongst other arguments he advances that of the superiority of the Christian above the Jewish economy: “Ye are not come,” he says, “unto the mount that might be touched”—not to a gross terrestrial mountain, the object of

sense, like mount Sinai—"and which burned with fire;" nor "unto the blackness, and darkness, and tempest" which attended the giving of the Law; nor to "the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words," delivered, by the ministration of angels, from the midst of that tempest, which hovered over Sinai,—a voice so dreadful, that they who heard it "entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more."—All the circumstances which attended the giving of the Law were awful and terrific;—for they could not endure the sternness of the command, "that if so much as a beast should touch the mountain it should be stoned or thrust through with a dart; and so terrible was the sight that even Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake." All these particulars are enumerated by the Apostle as indicating the nature of that dispensation which they introduced. He means to intimate that it was a dispensation of awe and terror, of rigour and restraint, of external and corporeal observances. When first promulgated, it was dreadful even to the Jews; nor could they be expected willingly to encounter, for the sake of it, such cruel sufferings and bitter persecutions as were appointed for those who professed the Gospel.

But, he adds, ye Christians are the subjects of a more attractive and endearing dispensation. Ye are come, not to Mount Sinai and its terrors, but to mount Sion and its mild glories. Ye are come, not to the parched and barren wilderness, but to "the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Ye are come, not to angels delivering the Law with sounds which thrilled the hearts of those who heard them, but to an innumerable company of angels, who are members of the same family with yourselves, and are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. "Ye are come," not to that posterity of Abraham who departed out of Egypt, but "to the general assembly and church of the first-born," who are enrolled in heaven;—not to God the Legislator of the Jews only, but "to God the Judge of all" the

earth;—not to an assembly of mortal men, but “to the spirits of the just made perfect,” perfected in holiness, as well as felicity, with whom you are joined as fellow-heirs of the same salvation;—not to Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, but “to Jesus, the Mediator of the new;”—not to the blood of bulls and goats, with which the people were sprinkled under the Law, but “to the blood of Christ,” which has ratified the covenant of grace, and therefore “speaketh better things than that of Abel,” whose blood cried for vengeance, while this pleads for mercy and communicates forgiveness.

Such appears to be the spirit of this comparison of the Apostle. The general purport of it is clear; but in order that we may derive from it that edification which it was designed to convey, I propose to consider it in detail, and to endeavour, through the Divine blessing, to convert each part into an useful subject of meditation, in the hope of elevating your conceptions of the value of that dispensation under which we have the privilege to live.

I. We are said to have “come to mount Sion.”—Mount Sion is here opposed to mount Sinai. Sion was a mount in Jerusalem having two summits; on one of which the temple was built; on the other, the palace and habitation of the kings of David. Now in various particulars did Sion excel Sinai. God descended on mount Sinai for only a short period; but in Sion he was said to dwell, and to make it his habitation for ever. On Sinai he appeared clothed in all the emblems of terror; in Sion was his visible presence; but it was the mild effulgence of a Deity dwelling at peace in the midst of his acceptable worshippers, and receiving their grateful homage. To Sinai the people were forbidden to approach, so awful was the mountain on which the Divine presence rested; to Sion they were invited to come, in order to take up their residence around the sacred place. Sinai was the seat of commands and threatenings; Sion, of mercies and bles-

sings. From Sion they hoped for salvation: (Ps. xiv. 7.) "Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Sion!" From Sion they expected the Messiah: "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Sion;" (Ps. cx. 2.) From Sion the kings of Judah looked for help and victory: "The Lord send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Sion." From Sion they waited for blessings: "The Lord shall bless thee out of Sion," (Ps. cxxviii. 5.) Sion was "the joy of the whole earth." "God was well known in her palaces as a sure refuge." "The Lord loved the gates of Sion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." "Glorious things were spoken of Sion, the city of God." Thus, it was in Sion that God dwelt as the Father of his people: hence he dispensed his blessings; there he laid aside his anger, and visited his children with mercy and love.

We find, accordingly, that the Christian Church usually received in the prophetic writings the name of Sion; by which it is intimated, that under the Christian dispensation God would dwell with his people, and extend to them his grace as he did upon mount Sion. So also, when it is said in the text, that we are "come to mount Sion," we may understand by it, that we are members of a dispensation abounding in mercy; that the religion we follow has no terrors, except to the impenitent and unbelieving; that God offers himself to us as our Protector, Benefactor, and Friend; that he fixes, as it were, his residence among us, in order that his blessing may be ever present with us; and that we are invited to make our refuge under the shadow of his wings, till the calamities of life be overpast.

See, then, my fellow-Christians, what is the hope of your calling. To be allowed to draw near to God, in any case, is a great mercy; but to draw near to him upon a throne of Grace, is the highest favour which we sinners can enjoy. To be admitted into covenant with him, even at mount Sinai, surrounded with every thing awful and terrific, would be an unspeakable

privilege; but to be received into the new covenant of grace, by which God shall be to you a Father, and you shall be to him as sons—by which God will, as it were, take up his residence among you, as at mount Sion,—this is indeed a privilege to walk worthy of which should be your great ambition, which ought to excite your utmost gratitude and joy, and which should operate as the strongest motive to obedience.

II. But to pass on to another particular:—We are come, says the Apostle, to “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.”

The Jews were admitted into covenant with God when they were in the wilderness; but we, being members of his church, are allowed to dwell with him as in a city—in a quiet, orderly, permanent state: and it is the city of God, the city in which he holds his residence, and which he defends with his presence as with a shield. Ours is the heavenly Jerusalem. The Jews were permitted to dwell in the earthly Jerusalem; But in the new dispensation every thing earthly becomes heavenly, every thing carnal is changed into spiritual. The mount that might be touched gives place to the spiritual mount Sion; the walls of the earthly city are exalted into those of the new city of God; the worship of forms and ceremonies is transformed into a worship of spirit and truth; the ceremonial offerings of bulls and goats are abolished, and the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving, of a humble and ready obedience, are substituted in their place. The Jews walked by sense; we walk by faith. Theirs was the grandeur of a magnificent temple built with stone, enriched with gold and jewels; ours is the glory of a spiritual building, a house not made with hands. We dwell in the church of the living God: the universe is our temple; and all the faithful servants of God, in heaven and in earth, angels and men, dwell in it as worshippers, continually offering up pure and acceptable offerings unto the Lord.

In order that we may comprehend aright the glory of the Christian dispensation, all our ideas should be spiritualized. It is too pure and too sublime, it partakes too much of that higher nature to which we hope to be advanced when this mortal body shall have put on immortality, and this corruptible incorruption, to be understood or valued aright by those who are gross and terrestrial in their minds. "Shew us your temple," says the carnal Jew, "shew us your Jerusalem." We answer, We can shew them, not however to the eye of sense, but to that of faith. The foundations of your ancient temple have been razed to the ground: the city of God, the ancient Jerusalem, has been destroyed. The place of his residence is no longer a single temple of stone, or an earthly city; he hath done what is infinitely more grand and sublime, more honourable to himself, more benevolent to man: he hath admitted us into an eternal and universal temple, in which angels and the spirits of the just made perfect unite their worship: he hath raised us to a participation in their spiritual service; he hath adopted us into his family, the church; he hath communicated to us his presence, not by displaying his external glory as at Sinai or Jerusalem, but in affording us his effectual protection and blessing. Were we admitted into his kingdom above, we should see no buildings of stone, no earthly sanctuary; because heaven is a state too high and noble for such edifices as these. For the same reason, Christians on earth are taught to elevate their minds to what is pure and spiritual: they see not with their bodily eyes the residence of God, but they behold, by faith, objects as real and substantial as if subject to the touch and sight, objects infinitely great, and durable, and excellent. They see the purposes of a temple fully answered; the advantages of a city abundantly afforded. The holy place at Jerusalem was defiled by the ravages of the heathen, who "broke down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers; the blood of the worshippers they spilt, like water,

on every side, and made Jerusalem a heap of stones;" but the real temple of God can never be defiled, never destroyed, never invaded. Its foundations are immoveable and eternal; its walls comprehend both earth and heaven; its spacious precincts admit every faithful servant of God, while all that are unholy are excluded from it. A city is built for defence, for quiet, for order, for enjoyment; it has laws and a government sufficient to ensure these advantages. Now these benefits are amply secured to that spiritual city of which the real disciples of Christ are the inhabitants. The living God, the God of all power and goodness, presides over it; he protects it; and every member of it is under his special care. The Almighty arms are like a wall of brass around it. Infinite Wisdom watches over it, prescribes to it laws, and provides for its happiness. With such advantages, shall we refuse to acknowledge it because it is invisible to the eye, and extended beyond that narrow spot of earth on which we dwell? Our ideas, if we are Christians, must be expanded, as well as our hearts purified; and then we shall see, by the eye of faith, that we are already inhabitants of a city which hath everlasting foundations, whose builder and maker is God; and when the soul shall quit this body, and enter into the heavenly state, the difference will be only this, that we shall be advanced to higher mansions, though still the subjects of the same universal King.

III. These observations on the nature of the heavenly Jerusalem will prepare us to understand the next clause, in which the Apostle says, "we are come to an innumerable company of angels."

In the church of Christ in this world, angels are not visible to our bodily eyes; our senses perceive no trace of their presence; yet we know from revelation that they are present with us, that they are employed by God in his administration of the affairs of the world, and maintain a constant communication with his Church. Round the little city in Israel, in which Eli-

jah was, were innumerable hosts of angels; but no one perceived them except the prophet, and he seems to have apprehended them only by faith: but when the eyes of his servant were opened at the prayer of the prophet, then he beheld, and, "lo, the city was encompassed with innumerable hosts of angels, with chariots of fire and with horsemen of fire!" The hosts of angels are truly innumerable: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place." And Daniel says of them, labouring to express their number, "Thousands of thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him."

To this innumerable company of beings, of the highest rank, and the most noble order, we are come; that is, we are united to them as members of the same society, as having the same common Lord, engaged in the same blessed works, partaking in the same worship, enjoying the same privileges, and about to inherit the same glory. When the Israelites at mount Sinai were favoured with the presence of angels, their access was corporeal only, but ours is spiritual; they heard their voice with their outward ears, but they had no spiritual communion with them. Their presence inspired terror in the Jews—their voice was dreadful—they were ministers of vengeance;—but their mission to us is a mission of love: they consider us as part of the same family, through Christ, who is both their Head and ours. He is the head of the whole body; he is their Lord and our Lord; the Lord both of those which are in heaven and of those which are in earth. We are come to them, therefore, as related to each other through Christ, as associates in fulfilling the work of Christ, and as fellow heirs of the glorious kingdom of Christ above. They doubtless have often fellowship with us, while, in obedience to the great Lord of all, or influenced by the spirit of general love, they assist our weak endeavours to serve God, deliver us from

the unseen attacks of spiritual enemies, or delight in witnessing in us the exercise of Divine grace. The angels in heaven rejoice over the repenting sinner: they encamp about those who fear the Lord: they receive the departing spirit, and convey it to the realms of glory.

IV. We are also come to "the spirits of just men made perfect."—I class these with the angels, as nearly allied to them: though the Apostle was, in his usual manner, too much impressed with the noble images before him to attend to the same orderly arrangement.

By the spirits of the just, are meant the souls of the righteous, who, being delivered from the burthen of the flesh subsist in a state of separation from the body in paradise. We are "come" to them—that is, we are united to them, though our bodies are separate, and this spiritual union is the pledge of our one day joining them and dwelling with them for ever. They were once men of like passions with ourselves, assaulted by the same temptations: but they were partakers of the same faith, servants of the same Lord, instructed by the same word, strengthened by the same ordinances, comforted by the same promises, victorious through the same Captain of their salvation. At length they were released from their conflict by death (as we shall ere long be,) and they joined the glorious assembly of the just;—an assembly in numbers as much surpassing the just now on earth, as it transcends them in purity and holiness;—an assembly every year, every day, every hour augmented by the addition of those who have departed this life in the faith and fear of God.

They are now "made perfect;" their labours are finished—their trial is over—their race is run—they have reached the goal—they have obtained the prize—they are made complete in all holiness and purity. Here, though sincere, they were imperfect,—their faith was imperfect, their hope, their obedience;—but now their faith is accomplished in sight, their hope is swallowed up in enjoyment, their

obedience is become perfect holiness; they now have obtained an entire deliverance from all sin and sorrow, from all labour and trouble; their bliss is consummated: they possess a felicity suited to their spiritual nature, commensurate with those higher faculties with which they are now endowed. Thus they are perfected, though not yet perhaps advanced to the utmost point at which they will arrive after the general resurrection and the final consummation of all things.

We are come to them, by being incorporated into the same kingdom, under the same common Head. We are still confined to the body, and they are freed from it; but there exists between us a spiritual connexion and the fellowship of Christian love. As Christians, we are commanded, when we follow to the grave our departed friends, not to sorrow as those that have no hope: they are only removed to a better part of God's dominion, where we shall soon join them. In the mean time, we may love them ardently, we may remember them affectionately, we may hold communion of spirit with them: knowing the sentiments they feel, and the blessed work in which they are engaged, we may rejoice in their joy, and triumph with them in the entire fulfilment of all those wishes which we knew to have been nearest to their hearts, and in the answer of all these prayers which they once so fervently offered up. Further communion, as yet, we cannot have; nor is it material, since the separation is so very short. Nor do we fully understand, as yet, the communion they hold with us, except that we are persuaded they can maintain it in a degree infinitely higher than we can, since their faculties are higher and more perfect.

V. We are come, besides, to the "general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven."—We have seen the parts of which this assembly is composed: here the Apostle brings them into one view. In the wilderness, a multitude was collected, but it was a multitude composed of discordant parts. There, be-

sides a faithful Caleb and a pious Joshua, were found the profane and the licentious, the murmuring, the self-willed, the unbelieving, and the rebellious. But, in this general assembly, all are truly excellent, all possess a dignity of which the privileges which men derive from their birth were only a type and shadow. The first-born is the heir; all the honours of the family centre in him, and he is the representative of the rest; and this was in ancient times still more particularly and universally the case. Hence Christ is styled the First-born: he is the most excellent of the whole family of Christians; through him Christians derive their birth-right and privileges. And every member of this great and august assembly may be said to be first-born in respect to his excellency and dignity.

It is added, "which are written in heaven."—It was usual to enrol the names of citizens, in order to ascertain who were entitled to the privileges of the state: the citizens of heaven, therefore, are said to have their names enrolled in the register of heaven. God, who knows the state of the heart, and whose judgment is unerring, himself enrolls them. And how honourable is it to have our names written in the book of life, inscribed in the sacred records of immortality! Such honour have all his saints!—This general assembly and church of the first born is composed of many tribes and families. It contains the patriarchs and the prophets, the martyrs and the confessors; all who, in the Old Testament Church, and all who, under the New, have loved and feared and served God; all the spirits of the just made perfect, and all the holy angels;—a vast assembly, which no man can number, out of every nation, and tribe, and kindred and order; but all united under one common Lord, engaged in one common pursuit, possessing a common interest, partaking a common nature, and crowned with a happiness common to them all. Oh glorious assembly! a kingdom which shall never be dissolved, never decay, never be threatened with internal commotions, or assaulted by

external enemies! How great an honour to be a member of it! Yet to this honour all real Christians are exalted. How poor and mean, in comparison with this, are all human distinctions and earthly privileges of birth! Yet, alas! how much is a temporal inheritance or dignity, in general, preferred to the citizenship of heaven! With what ardour ought we to offer up the prayer, that God would open the eyes of our understanding, that we may know what is the hope of our calling, and what the riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints!

VI. Lastly, we are also come to "God, the Judge of all; and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant."—The time forbids me to dwell upon these parts of the glorious description: it may be sufficient to say, that we are come to God, not as the Judge and Legislator of a particular tribe, as he appeared to be on mount Sinai; but as the Judge of all men, the Sovereign Ruler and Lawgiver of heaven and earth. We are come to him, not merely as being his creatures, but his redeemed people: as bearing to him a new and most honourable relation. We are come to him, in order that we may hold near communion with him, that we may be visited with his gracious presence, and receive continually out of the fulness of his grace and bounty. And we are come to Jesus Christ, the Mediator, the great Minister of Reconciliation, the Lord of angels and of men, who hath undertaken to combine them in one body, and bestow equal blessings on the whole family of God. The formation of this vast assembly is the work of Jesus Christ. He came down from heaven to accomplish it. He offered up his own most precious blood, that man might be cleansed from his transgressions, and might be accepted through his expiation for sin. This blood speaketh better things than that of Abel. The blood of Abel cried to God for vengeance; the blood of Christ pleads for mercy; the blood of Abel was shed involuntarily; the blood of Christ voluntarily, for the sins of the whole

world. Thus Christ, having redeemed his people from the curse of the law, presents them to the Father, sanctified by his Spirit, and prepared to join the great assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven.

I shall not interfere with your endeavours to derive improvement from this subject by attempting to direct your meditations upon it. It is the most sublime and encouraging subject which can be presented to the human mind. The contemplation of it will sustain us amidst all the sufferings and trials of the present life:—it will enlarge our ideas and elevate our piety:—it will endear to us, beyond expression, the name, and character, and office of that blessed Mediator through whom such inestimable privileges are conferred upon us:—it will make us think, and speak, and feel, and act, as men who are heirs of such an inheritance, exalted to such honour, and partakers of such inestimable blessings:—it will correct our false estimate of the things of sense and time, and teach us to judge as God judges, as the Scriptures direct, and as the truth of things dictates:—and, finally, it will impress upon us the infinite importance of the soul, the salvation of which it will show to be the one great end and object of human life.

SERMON IX.

ON THE WAY OF ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD

John xiv. 6.

No man cometh unto the Father but by me.

TO come to the Father is to be accepted by God, to be regarded favourably by him, to be allowed to approach him with confidence;—and this may have respect either to our now worshipping him in an acceptable manner, or to our being finally accepted by him at the day of judgment. It is not very material to which of these the words are supposed more directly to refer, since they are evidently closely connected with each other. If God favourably accepts the worship and service which a person offers him here, there can be no doubt but that he will graciously receive him at the last day into the kingdom of heaven.

The words of my text, then, inform us, that no person can be accepted by the Father unless through Jesus Christ: his sins must be pardoned, his guilt cleansed, his religious endeavours sanctified, his heart purified, and his person rendered acceptable, solely through Jesus Christ. They speak nearly the same language as

the Apostle did, when he said, "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved."

When we hear such words as these pronounced, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me;" it seems necessary to advert to the character and office of the Speaker. The words spoken seem to bear a most high and lofty sense: but whether they ought to be so interpreted, or whether they ought to be qualified and understood in a much lower sense, must be determined from our previous knowledge of the *Speaker*, from the *service* he claims, from the *titles* he elsewhere assumes, and from the *dignity* in other places attributed to him.

Allowing this rule of interpretation to be just, let us consider what is said of Jesus Christ in other places. And here we must call to mind, that he was born in an extraordinary manner, which shewed his origin to be very different from that of the children of men; that he described himself to have dwelt in heaven before his birth in this world, and to have come down from thence to be the Saviour of mankind; that God was, in a peculiar sense, his Father, and that a voice from heaven articulately pronounced him to be his only begotten Son; that he claimed the title of Supreme Judge of the world; that he was said to possess all power in earth and heaven, the Father having put all things into his hand; and that he proved his claim to such dignity and power, by a vast profusion of miracles of the most extraordinary kind.

Here, then, let us ask, Does not the high and lofty sense which the words obviously convey, exactly coincide with that high and lofty character which Jesus bore, and with all that the Scriptures have spoken elsewhere concerning his glory and dignity? Must the sense be lowered, as some persons would argue, to accommodate it to the Person? Or, rather, ought not the sense to be exalted as much as possible, in order to be adequate to the greatness of him who here speaks of

his own office? Various other passages of Scripture serve to throw light on the declaration of Jesus, that He is the way to the Father. He is represented, in some of them, as taking away the sin of man by the sacrifice of himself; in others, as the High Priest who presents the services of men and their worship to the Almighty; in others, as an Intercessor, or Advocate, pleading with his Father in their behalf; in others, as a Mediator between God and man, reconciling those who were at variance with each other; in all, as the grand procuring cause of our salvation, the agent by whom we are delivered from a state of misery and sin, and brought into the favour of God and to the enjoyment of eternal life.

But, in close connexion with what is spoken directly of the office of the Saviour, we should consider other doctrines, which bear closely upon it, and are intimately connected with it. In what terms do the Scriptures speak of the character of *God*? Doubtless as a most good and gracious Being, but yet, always as a very just and holy Being; as one who cannot bear iniquity, who is jealous of the honour of his Name, before whom the heavens are unclean, and who charges even his angels with folly; and also as one who cannot be approached by men, but in the use of such preparatory rites as he has pointed out.

In connexion with this character of God, let us consider the character which the Scriptures uniformly give of *man*. Man is represented as corrupt, as going astray from his youth, perverse and rebellious, foolish, and obstinate, ungrateful, unthankful, unholy. The old world was destroyed by the flood, because the wickedness of it was so great that it repented God that he had made man. The new world also, almost immediately departs from God, loses the very knowledge of his truth, and is wholly given up to idolatry. His favourite people, chosen out of the rest of the world, placed under his own immediate tuition and control, exhibit a degree of perverseness and depravity

which justifies the Scripture-account of the corruption of the whole race. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that would understand and seek after God; but they are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none righteous, no, not one."

If, then, man is represented throughout the Scriptures as very corrupt; and if the purity and holiness of God are always described to be, like his other attributes, infinitely good and great, these representations are closely connected with those passages of Holy Writ which speak of the necessity of a Mediator. They intimate a total separation between God and man: they shew the impossibility of an union between them; they manifest the propriety of some expedient to reconcile them to each other, something which shall render it consistent with the holiness and purity of God to permit the approach of man, something which shall prepare man to approach his God. Thus there is one consistent system throughout religion. All it teaches concerning God manifests his holiness; all it relates concerning man manifests his unfitness to stand in the presence of God. A Mediator, therefore, is prepared; one of infinite dignity—no less than the only begotten Son of God. He comes into the world, which was created by his power. He appears made, in all points, like unto man, sin only excepted. He thus becomes intimately related to the human race; yet he retains all his dignity and all his holiness, as a Divine Person; and is therefore worthy to intercede with the Father. In this character he stands, as it were, between the dead and the living, between sinful men and a holy God. He offers up his own life as an atonement for the sins of the world: he is invested with the character of the Mediator, the High Priest, the Intercessor, the Advocate of the human race: "the keys of hell and death" are put into his hands: "he openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth:" the Father hath committed all judgment to him; and pardon

and eternal life are dispensed through him, according to his will. Thus we may perceive an intimate connexion in every part of the system. The account given us of the character of God and of that of man, plainly evinces the necessity of a Mediator; while the view which is communicated of Christ Jesus, of his office and character, reflects fresh light on the nature both of God and man. From our knowledge of God and man, we might easily expect some such expedient as that of a Mediator and Redeemer to have been adopted. From the revelation of Jesus Christ we are confirmed in our view of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, and we perceive the wisdom and goodness of God in giving his Son to be the Saviour of mankind.

This view of the necessity of a known and established medium of intercourse between a holy God and sinful man, will receive much confirmation if we remark, that, from the period of the Fall, man appears to have been always directed to use some such expedient in his approach to God.—The account given of Cain and Abel is the first exemplification on record of this fact. Abel was accepted by God; but in what manner? By the offering, in faith of a sacrifice taken from the firstlings of his flock. Now had not Abel been divinely instructed, he would scarcely have thought that the sacrifice of an innocent animal could render him acceptable to his Creator, or indeed be acceptable to the Creator at all. There was nothing in that action which would have appeared naturally and obviously to be pleasing to God, but the reverse. If we consider it, however, as appointed by God to be the emblem of a sacrifice infinitely greater, which, four thousand years after, should be made for the sins of the world; if we consider it as typical of the necessity of some means of mediating between God, as a holy Judge, and man, as a guilty sinner: we shall then see the propriety of the sacrifices which were offered by man in his approach to God. Consistently with this

view of the subject. Noah, on coming forth from the ark, offered a sacrifice to God, and God was pleased with him and blessed him for it. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob built altars and sacrificed to the Lord. Job offered a sacrifice for his children and friends. And when God made himself known to the children of Israel, and gave them the grand revelation of his will by Moses, habitual sacrifices were enjoined: no man was to approach the tabernacle of God unless he brought some sacrifice or victim which was to be presented at the altar of God as a propitiation. Thus an idea was strongly inculcated, from the earliest ages, that there was no access to the Father but by that medium of sacrifice which he had appointed;—a method of approach which, when Christ had offered the precious sacrifice of his own life, was then clearly understood to bear reference to that great Propitiation, and to point out the impossibility of acceptance with God, except in and through a Mediator.

But it may be asked, If man has transgressed against God, is it not enough that he repent of his sin? Is not God merciful? Does he not delight to pardon sin? Does he desire any thing but to have his creatures sensible of their wants? Will not repentance be sufficient to avert his wrath, and to incline him to look with favour upon his frail creatures?

Doubtless repentance is indispensably necessary: without repentance on the part of man, he can never be accepted by God. The question, therefore, is, not whether repentance can be dispensed with, but whether repentance itself can be accepted without an atonement to give it efficacy, without something to justify God in accepting a penitent sinner. Doubtless the Patriarchs never considered sacrifice as superseding repentance; but they nevertheless thought it necessary to offer sacrifices. Repentance was most clearly enjoined under the Jewish dispensation, but so also sacrifice was enjoined: both were equally obligatory. And, under the Christian dispensation, let it not be thought

that faith in any degree supersedes repentance, for the preaching of the Apostles was that of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither of them alone will be sufficient. Indeed, they cannot be separated. Repentance is indispensably necessary on the part of a sinner, for an unrepenting sinner cannot be pardoned; but even where there is repentance, faith in Christ is no less necessary to give us an interest in the great Mediator, to render it proper on the part of a holy God to pardon the sinner.

I have thus endeavoured to point out the meaning of this passage, because it contains one of the most important doctrines of Holy Writ, which we cannot employ too much care in elucidating. The strength of our faith, in any particular doctrine, will depend on the clearness with which we ascertain its true bearing, as well as on the evidence which manifests it to be delivered in Scripture. Now it is upon the sacrifice and mediation of Christ that all our hopes of acceptance with God must be founded: it becomes us, therefore, to be most firmly established in the knowledge and belief of that doctrine. Nor will the investigation, which may be requisite for this purpose, be irksome to those who have felt as they ought the burden of their sins, who have duly reflected on the character of God, and who have been properly anxious respecting their acceptance with him. Such persons would not, without much serious examination and deep reflection, come to a final decision respecting the sense of passages of Scripture on which they build so much, as pointing out to them the way of access to God. But when, after having closely examined such passages, diligently compared them with other parts of Holy Writ, and considered them in connexion with the whole scheme of Revelation, they remain firmly persuaded of the truth which they inculcate, their faith will then rest upon a solid foundation: they will then know in whom they have believed; they will be filled with joy and peace in believing; they will lead a life of holy grati-

tude and love to God; they will enjoy fellowship with the Son and with the Holy Spirit; they will bring forth in the whole of their conversation, the fruits of a blessed union with Christ; and, knowing that their Redeemer ever liveth to make intercession for them, they will die in peace.

The sum, then, of the passage which we have been considering is this: Jesus Christ, the ever-blessed and eternal Son of God, came down from heaven to be the Mediator between the guilty and ruined children of men, and a holy God, whom they had justly offended by their sin; and he proclaims to man this important truth, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I am the *Way* by which alone you have access to the Father. I am the *Truth*, the Revealer of Divine truth: my words are truth, and will make you wise to salvation. I am the *Life*: the source, the fountain of all spiritual life: I communicate life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. And "no man cometh to the Father but by me:" no one will be received into the favour of God, who does not approach him in my name, trust to my mediation for the acceptance of his prayers and services, rely upon my death for the atonement of his sins, and prove himself to be my true disciple by the conformity of his heart and life to my precepts.

Such is, in effect, the declaration of our blessed Lord and Saviour. And now, my beloved brethren, allow me to apply it to your instruction and edification.

I need not remind you that we have all sinned, sinned often and grievously, against a holy and compassionate God. "We have," as we are justly taught to confess every Sunday, "erred and strayed from God's ways, like lost sheep;" made light of his Divine injunctions; "left undone those things which we ought to have done, and done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us." And you know that God is holy and just, and that he will assuredly punish for ever all sinners the guilt of whose transgression has not been pardoned. To many, in-

deed, this is a matter of no concern. In the hurry of their worldly business or pleasure, their mind is unfurnished with Scripture-knowledge and unimproved by Divine meditation, they pass through life without one serious thought respecting the favour of God, or one serious fear of his displeasure. But with many of you, my brethren, I would hope that it is otherwise. I trust that many of you are anxious to obtain eternal salvation; that you feel the burthen of your sins, are earnest to make your calling and election sure, and truly desirous to discover in what way you should walk in order to please God. Listen, then, and I will tell you the only way pointed out in Scripture, and therefore the only way I am warranted to recommend. It is a safe and tried way; a path, in which all the people of God, since the days of our blessed Lord's appearance upon earth, have walked. There is no other way by which we can have access to the Father. Hear, therefore, and your souls shall live.

In the first place, examine whether you truly repent of your sins. This is the first step, and it is an indispensable one. Are you humbled for your past transgressions, and bowed down under a sense of your sinfulness? Do you feel conscious of having committed iniquities which God's piercing eye alone could have discovered, and which expose you to his anger? Are you earnestly desirous, by God's help, henceforth to renounce all sin, and to lead a godly and Christian life? Are you determined to renounce the pomps, the vanities, the splendours of an ensnaring world; and to maintain an unceasing conflict with your spiritual enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil? Do you desire to put off the works of darkness, and to be clothed with the armour of light? Are you resolved to take upon you the yoke of Christ, to deny yourselves every forbidden indulgence, and to tread in the steps of your Master?—My brethren, till you can honestly give a satisfactory answer to these questions, as in the sight of God, who looks at the heart, I should be wrong to

hold out to you any promises of the Gospel, or to exhort you to trust in Christ for salvation: for the persons whom he invites to come to him are such as are weary and heavy laden with the burthen of sin; are such as feel themselves sick, and in need of a physician. His language is, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden:" "Hoe! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters:" "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."—But if you are indeed sensible of your sinful and lost condition before God; if you earnestly desire his mercy to pardon your transgressions, and are seeking, by faith and prayer, for the grace of his Holy Spirit to cleanse and to sanctify your souls; then let me exhort you to receive with all joy that true and faithful saying, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He can and he will save those who come to him by faith: and, I repeat it, there is no way of access to God but through him. Let your attention, therefore, be continually directed to that great Saviour, upon whom all the hopes of the sinner must be built; and seek not to approach God without a constant and direct reference to him. You must not trust, as many vainly do, that your innocence, or your repentance, will sufficiently recommend you to the favour of God. You must not look with complacency upon any fancied merit of your own; or imagine that your acts of worship can, in any degree, satisfy the demands of a holy God. You must renounce every method of salvation which your own corrupt nature may suggest: all your righteousness, as well as all your sins; because God himself has chosen a way, by which penitent sinners, and not self-righteous pharisees, shall be pardoned. Think, then, no more of self-dependence; abase yourselves before God; fall low in the dust at the footstool of his throne, and fix your hope solely on Jesus Christ as the Saviour. Contemplate seriously the dignity of his nature: he was God as well as man. Reflect on the value of his death: the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse from all sin. Consider the

offices which he sustains; he is the Head of the church, the Lord of glory, the Judge of the earth, the Saviour of mankind, the High Priest and Advocate appointed for sinners. You must be saved in a way which will do honour to him, in a way which will illustrate his glory. You must solemnly commit your souls to his care. You must humble yourselves as sinners before him, pleading with him for pardon, and acknowledging him to have all power on earth to forgive sin. You must present every prayer to the Father in the name of this great Intercessor. You must look to his mercy and love for grace to sanctify your hearts, as well as mercy to pardon your sins.—In a word, Jesus Christ must be the grand object of your esteem and reliance. You must honour him even as you honour the Father, and honour the Father through him. His gracious promises must be your support and consolation: his holy word must be your daily study, and must be deeply engraven on your hearts as the rule of your conduct: his ordinances must be your joy: his spotless life, the example of his love and mercy, the model for your imitation. In a word, Christ must be your Friend, your Saviour, your Shepherd, your Treasure, your Life, your All in all. It is through his instrumentality that every blessing which the bounty of God can ever give will be conveyed, and through this must they all be sought. Through him you must finally be made meet to say, with all the ransomed saints above, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and glory, and honour, and majesty, and dominion, for ever and for ever.”

Need I conclude, my brethren, by urging you to love and to prize that Saviour to whom you are so infinitely indebted? No love can be too great which is shewn towards him. Try, then, to evince it by every means which the sincerest affection can dictate. Above all things strive to shew it by an unreserved obedience to him. There is no sacrifice too great, which you can make for him who sacrificed his own life upon the

cross for you. No act of self-denial can be deemed too great for his sake, whose whole life, from its beginning to its end, was one great act of voluntary self-abasement, that he might exalt you to the throne of his glory.—But I forbear to enlarge upon this point. Those who duly consider the infinite obligations which they are under to Jesus Christ, will be deeply sensible that no words can express the fervour of praise, the strength of attachment, or the intuseness of devotion which we owe to him. God grant “that we may, with all saints, comprehend the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.”

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON X.

ON INSTABILITY IN RELIGION.

Gen. xlix. 4.

Unstable as Water.

THESE words are part of the description given of Reuben's character by his father Jacob, when, upon his death bed, he called his sons around him to bequeath them his blessing. Reuben was his first born, and therefore to him, of right, belonged the superiority over his brethren: to him also was the priesthood, in the patriarchal dispensation, allotted;—the chief honour in the worship of God, as well as the chief dominion in point of temporal authority. But though Reuben was thus entitled to be considered as the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power, he forfeited his right to these distinctions, partly by his character and partly by his misconduct. His character is comprised in the words of the text—he was “unstable as water.” This natural instability of disposition, if it was not the direct cause of his sin, might at least unfit him for resistance to temptation, and would naturally be followed by the effect of diminishing his authority and con-

sequence: and thus, though the first-born, he became inferior to his brethren, and lost the rank and title which God and nature had assigned him. We are not sufficiently acquainted with the character of Reuben to state distinctly in what respects this instability of temper manifested itself: nor is it material: our business is with modern characters; and it is not merely an unstable disposition, as it shews itself in the common affairs of life, but as it respects religion, concerning which we treat.

There are many persons, who appear to set out well in a religious course, but who afterwards turn back and renounce all pretensions to piety. Such are described by our Saviour under the image of corn planted on stony ground: their religion, flourishing for a time, totally dies away, like the withered corn which has no soil to support it.—But these are not the persons who answer to the character of *unstable*. This term supposes them to continue their religious profession to the last, but with great irregularity and repeated interruptions. Sometimes they are deeply affected with the importance of spiritual things: they lament, in the humblest strains, their departure from God; they set out afresh with redoubled earnestness and zeal; they impose upon themselves the strictest rules; and you would imagine they would soon arrive at the greatest heights in piety. But, alas! all this goodness passes away like the morning dew. You soon see them relapsing into their former state, or even committing acts of profligacy of which you deemed them incapable. Then, again, you hear them bewailing their folly: repenting, and returning to God, with the same earnestness, perhaps, as before. Their whole life is thus a succession of inconsistencies; a conflict of opposite principles and inclinations; their better judgment directing them to religion, but their passions prompting them to sin. If particular seasons or remarkable providences excite their repentance and the renewal of their vows, when the impression of these ceases, their

repentance declines, and their vows are forgotten. Through the same fickleness, they are led, even without any intention of deceiving, to adopt the complexion of their society: with the pure they appear pure, and with the worldly they manifest a spirit of worldliness. Such conduct cannot be thought consistent either with a good conscience or with utility. In fact, such persons are self-condemned. They are themselves convinced, that with such unsteadiness of principle, they must not expect to be good or happy. Their life, therefore, is useless, their feelings painful. Often do they desire a better state, and often do they seriously attempt to attain it; but, with a mind never long intent upon one object, their wishes and endeavours gradually expire.

Now it is true, that such characters may be rare, in the extent to which I have described them; but a degree of this inconsistency is very common. The causes which produce it are but too generally prevalent, and they deserve to be known, in order that we may guard against them.

I. The first cause which may be assigned for this instability, is *natural constitution*.—There are undoubtedly some who inherit from nature a degree of fickleness and inconstancy. Even in childhood may be traced a perpetual fluctuation of inclination; an insatiable eagerness after something new; an ardency in every new undertaking, and a hasty dissatisfaction with it. I need not however dwell upon this head, except to warn parents and instructors of the necessity of using every endeavour to check such an unhappy disposition in their infant charge. Let them beware how they cherish or indulge it; for it is a disposition incapable of bringing any thing great or good to perfection; which entails disappointment, disgrace, and misery upon its professor. No obligation can be greater than what is due to an instructor, who has carefully laboured to give steadiness and perseverance to such a natural disposition.

2. But I proceed to assign a second cause, often indeed nearly connected with the former: viz. *the force of habit*.—Not to know the power of habit, is to be ignorant of the very first rudiments of self-knowledge. We are very much what we have accustomed ourselves to be. Suppose, then, that a person, in the common business of life, has given full licence to an inconstant disposition; has allowed himself to be earnest or to trifle in business as the inclination of the moment prompted, has been accustomed, even in his amusements, to be guided by caprice and love of novelty: there is great danger, should this person become impressed with a sense of religion, of his carrying his inconstancy into his religious pursuits. Unstability will be his besetting sin, the sin against which he will need to watch and pray with the utmost earnestness and perseverance. Let him consider that here is his danger; and that as grace in the heart is intended to form a new character, so it must be his object that religion shall overcome his inconstancy in all things. Inconstancy should be considered by him as a great crime: for, in his case it is not only a sin but the parent of every other sin: it stifles and destroys every laudable and useful quality.

3. But we must search deeper into the cause of inconstancy than the force of habit, and inquire in what sources the habit itself originates. This I consider to be a *want of self government*.

There is in all men a desire of present enjoyment, a love of self-indulgence, which it is the office of reason, conscience, and religion, to restrain. I say, a desire of present enjoyment—for it is the enjoyment of the moment which prevails with an inconstant temper; and, for the sake of this, it is often willing to sacrifice any future good. In others, we perceive the exercise of self-denial; but in those who are inconstant, the reins are given to self-indulgence; the power of self-government is in a great measure abandoned. Hence they yield to the first temptation. In the ab-

sence of temptation they judge rightly, they see clearly, they resolve excellently; but the moment self-denial is required, their power departs, like that of Samson when his locks were shorn, and they appear destitute of every religious feeling.

Let such men learn, therefore, to consider their inordinate desire of present ease or indulgence as their bane and crime. Let them remember, that self-denial must be exercised to attain any thing excellent or desirable; that for them, especially, it is one of the most essential attainments; that to the Christian it is as necessary as fortitude to the soldier; that our Lord has expressly enjoined it upon his disciples,—“if any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me;” and that his true disciples have faithfully obeyed this injunction:—“I keep under my body,” says St. Paul: “and bring it into subjection; lest, after having preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away.” Oh! let them reflect, that the pain of self-denial is pleasure, compared with the pain they now suffer from the predominance of sense over reason, and the violence they perpetually do to conscience. Let them consider the example of Christ. Did he live to please himself? Did not he set the example of self-denial? Were his sufferings so acute, and shall we be afraid of the least resistance to our appetites? Let them look at the noble army of martyrs, who “resisted even to blood;” the goodly company of confessors, who “took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake.” Oh! let them, at length, learn to “endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.”

4. If we trace this disposition still farther to its source, we shall find it originates in a *want of those first principles which are essential to constitute a Christian Character*.—Such persons have not, for instance, a due sense of the sinfulness of their own conduct. However they may occasionally blame themselves, they do not regard, as they ought, their frequent de-

partures from God as a proof of the greatest depravity and corruption. They are prone to shelter themselves under the general terms of human frailty and natural fickleness of disposition. But let them remember, that this fickleness is but a symptom of a heart still alienated from God and totally corrupt. Let them be sensible, that, if their heart was right with God, there would be a steady attachment to him and an abiding sense of the baseness of their conduct. Their very repentance is superficial; nay, deep as it may seem for the moment, I must add, it is insincere; for the first mark of sincerity is constancy. Let them strip off, therefore, all disguises from their conduct, and they will see that their hearts are still under the reigning and habitual power of sin; that their sinful compliances are not to be considered as occasional deviations from a general state of holiness; but, on the contrary, that their fits of repentance are rather to be considered as occasional deviations from the habitual and corrupt state of their minds. It is, indeed, painful at all times to judge harshly of ourselves; but deep wounds must be thoroughly probed; and, in this case, it is self-conceit which checks their advancement, and satisfies them under a state of alienation from God.

5. Nearly connected with the last source of inconstancy, is the *want of a just apprehension of their own instability*.—The weakness of man is always great, but in cases such as these it is extreme: such persons are totally helpless; yet trusting in their present feelings, they are ever prone to flatter themselves that they shall no more depart from God. Miserable self-deception! By such vain hopes they quiet for a season the remonstrances of conscience, and prepare themselves again to suffer disappointment. A deep sense of their utter degeneracy and weakness is especially necessary to counteract the levity of their disposition. Then, instead of resolving so confidently, they would with humility implore the aid and mercy of God; they would be “jealous of themselves with a godly jealousy;” faith

in Christ would be assiduously cultivated: for those who feel their guilt, and their inability to save themselves will naturally and joyfully take refuge in the grace and power of one who is "able to save to the uttermost" them that call upon him.

6. There is another point in which characters such as these require to be instructed: viz. *the importance of the favour of God*.—Let them consider the character of God. He is pure and holy. He will not be trifled with. He is worthy of the whole heart, and will not dwell in any heart that is divided with mammon. And, if he is sought earnestly, with a due apprehension of his majesty and greatness, let them know that he has grace to communicate to the most weak and unworthy; and that no disposition is, either by nature or by habit, too corrupt to be purified by his grace. But he requires sincerity: he will not be mocked by vain declarations, like those of the son who said to his father, "I go, sir, but went not." Is not salvation worthy to be sought with the whole heart? Is not the favour of God the greatest blessing which man can enjoy? Let those who have neglected this, ask themselves what they have yet attained—not the testimony of conscience, the hope of heaven, or the favour of God—nothing, indeed, but vanity and vexation of spirit, from those indulgences which have led them astray. And is it for this they have given up the pure enjoyment of the presence of God, and communion with him? How will they feel when they come to die? In what a light will the folly of their conduct then appear? How bitter will the recollection then be of their departure from God: how vain and base will appear the temptations which drew them aside; how corrupt that disposition over which such temptations had so much power! Let those, who, like Reuben, are unstable as water, lay these things to heart. Let them consider how truly valuable the grace of God is, and how much it ought to be preferred above every thing else. Without it they cannot but be

wretched. But, while they seek the grace of God, let them seek for what is really such—a new heart and a new nature; a powerful, active principle, inclining them steadily to what is good, and subduing what is evil.

7. And this leads me to a further observation, which it is of great importance to inculcate upon the unstable. “A double-minded man,” says the Apostle, “is unstable in all his ways:”—inconstant in prayer, inconstant in his religious profession, unsettled and wavering in his conduct, approving one thing and practising another. “Let not that man,” says the Apostle, “think he shall obtain any thing of the Lord.” He must lay aside his wavering character, and turn with his whole heart to God.—Now these words of the Apostle convey to us a very important lesson, as to the true cause of a wavering disposition;—the heart of such persons is not singly and supremely fixed upon God. The love of the world; the love of money, the desire of praise, the gratification of vanity—these, or some other evil passions predominate in the heart. Let it, therefore, be your care to give to God the first place in your affections. Come to a point with yourselves. Endeavour to mark out the path of duty. Consider it as a path which religion and reason prescribe, and a deviation from which is a desertion of your true happiness. Bring this consideration to bear upon every act of your lives: let it govern you in the detail of them, and fix the precise line in which you shall habitually walk.

But it may be said, by some who have followed me in this argument, “We feel the truth of the statement, and the dangers of instability; but our very infirmity makes us hopeless of improvement: we cannot depend upon ourselves.”—It is true that you cannot, and therefore let this teach you to depend upon God. For this purpose, remember that nothing can be hoped without steadiness in private prayer: without this you must not expect the grace of God. Here, therefore, you must

make a vigorous stand against the weakness of your nature. Let no urgency of business, no indisposition of mind, prevail upon you to neglect the stated seasons of secret devotion. Call to mind the vast importance of this duty. If you depart from God, you throw away your armour, you lose your strength.—At the same time, it is necessary to guard you against discouragement on account of occasional failures, or unwilling deviations from the path of duty. There is a danger of rashly giving way to despair because all our hopes are not at once realized; as though nothing were done because all is not accomplished. Now it must by no means be expected that your victory over a besetting sin and a corrupt nature should be at once complete and final. This would not be suitable to the ordinary course of God's providence. This life is, in fact, rather a series of contests than a course of victory. It is described as a struggle, a warfare; and that against an enemy formidable by his power and hatred. Do not therefore abandon yourself to despair, even under frequent disappointments; but continue to resist, continue to struggle, continue to hope. The victory will never be complete till the day of death, when the "last enemy shall be subdued under our feet." It is only the ceasing to strive, the surrendering of ourselves to the enemy, which indicates a total defeat.

Above all things, never lose sight of the mercy and love of that Saviour, in whose strength alone you can prevail. While truly engaged in resisting sin, be assured he beholds you with compassion and favour; and that he will not forsake you if you call upon him. It will make much difference in the nature of your resistance, whether you are trusting to a disposition already proved to be fickle and infirm, or whether you are trusting to Him who is an ever-present help in time of trouble and infirmity. Here, then, must be your strong hold. Look to the "Captain of your salvation," to the Friend of sinners. Rely upon his mercy and

love—a love proved by the shedding of his blood for you, a mercy manifested in every page of the Sacred Writings. Keep, therefore, your hope stedfastly fixed on him. “Be strong in the Lord and the power of his might.” However threatened or opposed, “be stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not” finally “be in vain in the Lord.”

SERMON XI.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN NECESSARY TO REPENTANCE.

(PREACHED DURING LENT.)

1 John iii. 4.

Sin is the transgression of the law.

AT this season of the year we are directed, for a considerable period before our commemoration of the sufferings and death of our blessed Saviour, to prepare ourselves for its celebration by penitential exercises; and with much reason; for exactly in proportion to the sense of our sinfulness will be the value we shall place on the inestimable Sacrifice which was offered up on our behalf. In pursuance of this excellent intention of our church, it is my wish to endeavour to promote in myself and you a spirit of sincere repentance for our transgressions against God.

Repentance pre-supposes a knowledge of our sin. There may, indeed, be a knowledge of sin without any repentance on account of it, but there cannot be repentance without a due knowledge of our transgres-

sions; and, in general, where there is true repentance, it will be rational, deep, and abiding in proportion to the clearness of our view of the number, quality, and heinousness of our transgressions.

What is sin? The Apostle answers, It "is the transgression of the law." Let us keep this definition in view, in order to form a just idea of sin. Unscriptural ideas on religious subjects have, perhaps, more than any thing else, contributed to a corrupt conduct. This is particularly the case with respect to sin. Men form to themselves ideas of sin very different from those which the Scripture warrants, and then pronounce themselves either to be free from it, or to need nothing more than a slight and superficial repentance.

I. "Sin is the transgression of the law."—This supposes that there is some law given by the Almighty which sin transgresses. Now the *laws of God* are of various kinds, and made known in different ways. Some have been expressly revealed: others have been written in the hearts of men by nature. Some are determinate—forbidding certain actions; others indeterminate—requiring the cultivation of certain dispositions, or the performance of certain duties. In whatever manner the law has been revealed, to whatever points it is directed, if that law be transgressed, there the guilt of sin will attach.

Now it is evident, from this account of the nature of the law, that more sin may be committed against the indeterminate precepts of the law than against those which are determinate; and yet the transgressors of the former class of precepts be far less sensible of their guilt. If, for example, such a determinate law be given as, "Thou shalt do no murder," a person will certainly know whether he has been guilty of breaking this law or not: but if an indeterminate law be given, such as this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength;" this law a man may be breaking every day and every hour of his life, and yet may not be sensible of it, nor

he led to repent of his habitual transgression. Now it is in this very way that the greatest part of mankind deceive themselves. They consider chiefly the determinate precepts; such, for instance, as forbid certain crimes; but those which are indeterminate they do not regard, although they are equally enjoined by God, and the neglect or violation of them is therefore equally sinful. If God commands a certain duty and you neglect it, do you not contract as much guilt as if you had committed an action which he had forbidden? The guilt arises, not from the quality of the particular act, but from its being a transgression of the law of God.

The law of God requires certain dispositions and tempers: now if a man is not actuated by these dispositions he is guilty of habitually breaking the Divine law, and therefore is habitually living in a state of sin. The laws of man respect *actions* only, but the pure and holy law of God requires that the *dispositions* also should be regulated. Hence, to prove that you have not sinned, it is not enough to say, "I have not committed such and such crimes;" the question will still recur, "Have you constantly lived under the influence of those tempers and dispositions which the law of God enjoins?" If you have not, you are clearly a transgressor. The law of God requires you to be heavenly-minded, to be meek and kind, and to love your neighbour as yourself; it requires you to be pure and chaste, and to be "holy even as" Christ is "holy;" the man, therefore, who does not in the fullest degree possess these dispositions, is living in the hourly, nay constant, commission of sin, however unconscious he may be of his transgression and guilt.

2. "Sin is the transgression of the law." But, then, it is the transgression of a law of *which the spirit is to be regarded rather than the letter.*—An inattention to this truth is another fruitful source of error. Many will say, "Shew us that this or that particular action is forbidden, and we will no longer practise it: but do not make that to be sin which is not declared to be so

by God himself." To this I reply, that the laws of God are to be interpreted by a rule in some measure contrary to that which human governments employ. In criminal cases, the judge will not suffer a penal statute to be strained beyond its literal meaning in order to condemn a prisoner: but the law of God, which requires the highest conceivable purity, both of heart and life, is to be interpreted in the most extensive sense: it forbids not only the sin; but every thing connected with it, every thing leading to it. It is in this manner that our blessed Lord, in his Sermon on the Mount, insists upon the most extensive interpretation of the commandment: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, 'Thou shalt not kill: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother, without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment.'" Here the spirit as well as the letter, of the law is considered; and the spirit of the commandment forbids every degree of hatred or anger, and says, with St. John, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."—It is not necessary, therefore, to the guilt of the criminal, that the particular crime of which he is guilty should be expressly named in Scripture. It is sufficient that the general class of sins under which it may be ranked, be forbidden: or that the disposition from which, in common with many other sinful acts, it proceeds, be contrary to the pure and holy law of God.

It may be objected perhaps, that "so to apply the law of God as to enlarge the bounds of transgression, is to represent it as far more severe than the laws of men." Now with the mercy of God the present question has nothing to do. God is merciful and compassionate to a degree far greater than man can conceive. He does not, however, shew his mercy by narrowing the limits of transgression, and allowing the sinner to entrench himself behind the mere letter of the law. His compassion and mercy are shewn, not in altering the nature or abating the penalty of sin, but in freely pardoning

innumerable and heinous transgressions, that "as sin hath abounded, so might grace much more abound." The law of God bears the character of the Deity whose mind it declares, and is, like himself, infinitely holy. It is so pure, that a moment's reflection must convince us it could not proceed from man. It approves itself to be of Divine origin by its purity and perfection, as much as the light of the sun displays the power of the Creator by its utility and lustre.

3. Again: "Sin is the transgression of the law." *But it is not necessary to the guilt of such transgression, either that the law should be distinctly known, or the transgressor be conscious that he has committed a sin in breaking it.*—The law may be broken and man fall under its condemnation, without knowing or suspecting the consequences of his misconduct. For, in this case, as in that of human laws, it is sufficient that the offender *might* have known what the law was. If our sinfulness depended upon the distinctness of our knowledge of the law, it would follow, that those who least read the Bible, or least endeavoured in other ways to ascertain the will of God, would be the most innocent. If our guilt depended upon our consciousness of transgression, it would follow, that the man in whom the habits of sin have "seared" the conscience, and extinguished the sense of demerit, would be comparatively guiltless. But this is an absurdity too gross to be admitted. We must therefore adopt a different rule of judgment: we must view it as the first duty of every man to ascertain the will of his Creator: we must hold, that, in proportion to his means of acquiring this knowledge, his ignorance of it becomes criminal; and that, therefore every person of competent understanding, who has the Bible before him, or who has the means of knowing what it enjoins, will be considered as guilty before God whenever he violates any of its precepts, even although through his carelessness and indifference, he may be absolutely unacquainted with their nature and extent. But it is to be feared that men in general judge

of their criminality merely by their consciousness of it. They are not conscious, they say, of having done any thing wrong; and therefore they conclude that they have no guilt to answer for. A more erroneous and dangerous principle cannot be conceived. If this be true, you need only overlook your sin, or persuade yourself it is not sin, and then it will cease to be so; you will no longer be guilty. How convenient a rule would this be for all who are too indifferent to religion to acquaint themselves with its injunctions, or too hardened in iniquity to be sensible of transgression! And how many deceive themselves by, first, so narrowing the bonds of sin as to allow only the grossest acts to be criminal; and then, by deeming themselves guiltless, merely because their consciences are at ease! Man's conscience, however, is not the legitimate interpreter of the Divine law. It is the office of conscience, indeed, to accuse and reprove us when we have done wrong; but, if conscience fails in its duty; if it be uninformed, or blind, or corrupt; if it becomes, as it too often does, a partner in the crime; this will not alter the nature of sin, or the responsibility of man: sin will still be the transgression of the law of God, and not merely the doing of what we may know or feel to be wrong. The sinfulness of an action depends not on our feelings, our knowledge, or our judgment, but on the immutable law of God. He who transgresses that law, he who does not strictly fulfil its demands, is a sinner in the sight of God, however he himself may view his conduct. And how many lamentable instances do we daily witness of the delusion which leads men to be self-satisfied, even while they are habitually practising sins of a very deep dye! One man is entirely engrossed with the world, and yet does not at all reflect that worldly-mindedness is forbidden by God. Another is guilty of the basest ingratitude, in never praising and adoring his great Benefactor, or striving to please him, and yet is unconscious of his guilt. He is living without prayer to God, and yet feels no self-condemnation;

may, his conscience may approve his course of life as right and acceptable in the sight of God, while he is thus habitually transgressing the Divine law. And we know that men, even while persecuting and killing the servants of God, may think that they are actually "doing God service"—so false and dangerous, then, is the rule which would make our own feelings the measure of our guilt. Let us adhere to the definition of Scripture: "Sin is the transgression of the law." Whoever does not obey those commands of the law which he might have known, is so far criminal: and his ignorance of the law, when that ignorance is wilful, is not only no extenuation of his sin, but an aggravation of it.

4. Further: "Sin is the transgression of the law."—By keeping this definition in view, we shall avoid the error of those who *place the guilt of sin solely in the intention with which it is committed*. If they did not intend to sin, they conceive that they have not sinned. Now, I will not deny, that if a man sincerely intended to do the will of God; and, without prejudice or indifference, has used all the means in his power to ascertain that will, such an idea might be just; but this is by no means its ordinary use or application. The drunkard, the man of pleasure, the sabbath breaker, will tell you that they did not intend any thing sinful; they had no express purpose of disobeying or offending God. In short, all the various classes of sinners mean, according to their own statement, simply their own gratification. They profess to entertain a reverence for God, and they cannot conceive that any action of theirs can be construed into an intentional violation of the respect which is due to him. Now it is evident, that almost every sin which men commit is but the abuse of the natural principle of self-gratification; and, therefore, it is no palliation of our guilt to say that we did not intend to sin. A man must have attained to no small degree of malignant feeling, who could intend to commit sin, as such—that is, without a

view to his own personal gratification. But if we gratify ourselves in a way which God has forbidden, we are guilty of sinning against God, whatever be in this respect our wish or intention. How awful is it to reflect, that by forming unscriptural ideas of the nature sin, men may so deceive themselves as to suppose that they sincerely love and honour God, while they are daily living in the neglect or open violation of his commands!

5. Another mistake into which many persons are apt to fall, is that of judging of sin rather by its probable *effects* than by its intrinsic heinousness as a violation of the law of God. They reason thus: "God is a most benevolent Being, who wills only the happiness of mankind: his wisdom directs him to forbid what is injurious, and to recommend what is advantageous to their interests: hence, that is sinful which is dangerous in its consequences, and that is righteous which tends to the happiness of mankind." With respect to this mode of reasoning, I would observe, that it is not warranted by the Scriptures. They represent sin as evil because it is committed against the authority of God, and not merely because it is injurious to man. Without doubt, every thing which God has forbidden would be injurious to man: yet the principle on which we should abstain from evil is reverence for the authority of God, rather than any view of utility or interest. The commands of God are to be considered as a test of our love to him, and our regard for his authority; but it is entirely to lose sight of this view of the subject, if we represent it as a mere matter of prudence, or expediency, whether we will yield obedience to those commands or not. Besides, were the principle true, that the evil of sin is to be estimated simply by its effects; yet, who is to be the judge of those effects? Must each individual decide for himself how far this or that action is likely to be attended with pernicious consequences? Who sees not that such is the selfish bias of our minds, that, in this case, no sin would be

strongly condemned which was very agreeable to our corrupt appetites? We should find that *present* pleasure, *present* advantage, *present* gratification, would press with undue weight upon our minds. Besides, is any man able to estimate even the immediate, much less the remote, consequences of his transgressions? They may even be exercising their baneful influence long after he himself is laid in the grave. Who, then, can have duly calculated all these consequences?—Further: are the honour and glory of God, and the injury done to him by sin, of so little account in comparison of the welfare of man, that they need not be considered? Yet, if taken into the account, who shall estimate these?—There scarcely, therefore, can be a more dangerous error than that of judging of sin merely by its consequences. Yet the common excuses for sin shew to what an extent this mode of judging prevails;—"I have done no harm—I have wronged no one—My sin has been injurious only to myself." Now what is this, but to withdraw the eye from God, and to fix it exclusively on the pernicious effects which sin produces to mankind?

6. Another mode of judging of sin, equally common, and equally contrary to the word of God, is that of estimating it by the *opinions of the world* rather than by Scripture.—When a person considers the propriety of an action, he too often has recourse to the opinion which is entertained by the world respecting it. But the general opinion is not the law, or the just interpretation of the law. In all such cases, we should appeal "to the law" of God, "and to the testimony" of God. We should take the Bible into our hands, to determine what is right or wrong. The opinions of the world may be very erroneous. It will be no sufficient excuse, at the great day of account, to say, "I avoided every thing which was generally condemned, and did every thing that was generally applauded." The question will then be asked, "Did you comply with what was commanded in the Scriptures—with the revealed wil-

of God?" Such false estimates of sin do, in effect, deprive Scripture of its value. The custom of the world is substituted for it; and the world, instead of being corrected by the Divine Oracles, becomes itself the standard of truth, and modifies them accordingly.

We may see, from the various dangerous errors which I have enumerated, the necessity of applying, directly and simply, to the word of God, in order to form just ideas of the nature of sin and holiness. The Bible is to be our instructor and our guide: it should be in the place of God to us, for it is the voice of God speaking to us. Here we apply to a pure source: we drink at the fountain-head of truth and life. Hence those holy men, whose piety is left upon honourable record, derived their views of holiness and sin: "O Lord! how I love thy law! all the day long is my study in it.—Thou, through thy commands, hast made me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever before me—Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate on thy word." We should endeavour to imbibe the spirit which the Bible exhibits. It is not to be considered so much a collection of precepts or ordinances, as an exposition of principles and dispositions. The law of God has a view chiefly to these. It requires holy principles and dispositions, as well as holy actions. It requires these principles and dispositions to be uniform, perfect, constant. Now, "sin is the transgression of the law;" it is the neglect or want of those dispositions, or the violation of those principles, which the law of God enjoins.

The chief evil of sin consists in the insult which it offers to the majesty and greatness of Him who is the Creator and Lord of all things. He has given us a law—a law which is most holy and just and good, and in its very purity bears the stamp of proceeding from a holy God. This law man is bound to observe; because it is most just and reasonable that the will of the Great Creator, the wisest and best of Beings, the Supreme ruler of heaven and earth, should be perfectly fulfilled. It is no excuse for man to say that his na-

ture is weak and corrupt, and therefore he cannot observe it; for the same plea might then be made by other beings, the authority of God be every where despised, and the universe become a scene of confusion and misery. It is meet and right that there should be but one will and one law; and that this law and will should be His whose is the power, the wisdom, and the glory. That this law is strict, very strict, far too strict for man in his fallen state to fulfil, cannot be denied; but a less holy law would fail of conveying to us adequate ideas of the greatness and holiness of the Being whose transcript it is. Besides, the obligation of man to obey is infinitely strong. For what is the relation in which he stands to God? Is not God the author of his being, the giver of his faculties, the bestower of all his comforts? Is the law to be relaxed, to accommodate the weakness and corruption of man? Or, rather, ought not that very weakness and corruption to be exposed and corrected by the purity of the law? It is true that the law is sufficiently strict to condemn every child of man; not one of our fallen race, not the holiest man who ever lived upon earth, not the most faithful and zealous apostle of Jesus Christ, could ever come up to the standard which the law sets before us. Though there are great shades of difference in sin, all fall short, infinitely short, of the Divine standard. In this respect, all are upon a level—they “have all come short of the glory of God: as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one”—“There is not a just man, which liveth and sinneth not.”

Were the law a rule by our complete obedience to which, alone, we could obtain salvation, our circumstances would indeed be arduous: we might complain of our lot as wretched, and lament that our destruction was inevitable: but God, in his great mercy, has provided another, and a very different way of salvation. It is a way, however, in which our guilt and unworthiness must be felt and acknowledged: a way by which God will appear “just” as well as the “justifier of him

which believeth in Jesus." Now it is to be feared, that this wise and holy constitution of the Almighty is often overlooked or mistaken; and that men, considering the law only as a system of rules, by their obedience to which they shall be justified, seek to lessen its demands, and thus to reduce it to the imperfect standard of man's righteousness. Hence are derived false modes of interpreting the law; and hence springs that inferior holiness which is the natural fruit of false conceptions of the nature of sin.

"Sin is the transgression of the law."—This definition is plain, simple, and level to every capacity; yet so full, that no other account of it need be sought. Let this, my brethren, regulate your views of sin and of yourselves. Let the Bible be continually in your hands. Refer every thing "to the law and to the testimony" which it contains. Weigh well the import of those most expressive precepts which require the whole heart to be given to God. In proportion as you set these before you, you will discover your own defects: you will mark with surprise the extensiveness of the law of God, and the purity and holiness of its demands. Such views will indeed "humble," but they will finally "exalt" you. They will lay a foundation for real repentance. You will say with the Psalmist, "My sins are a sore burthen, too heavy for me to bear—they are more in number than the hairs of my head;" or in the words of our excellent Liturgy, you "will acknowledge and bewail your manifold sins and wickedness," of which "the remembrance is grievous, the burthen intolerable." This will give you that poverty of spirit which our Lord "blesses," as the sure preparation for the kingdom of heaven. This will lead you to Christ, as your only, but all sufficient, Saviour, with a sense far stronger than words can express of the benefits which you owe to him; with a glow of gratitude that will induce you to give up your whole life to him; with a delightful hope, which will indeed make Christ the Sun of righteousness to your souls. And, finally,

this will lead you to yield an obedience more strict in proportion to your enlarged views of the Divine law, and more willing in proportion to the excellency which you will discover in the holy God whom you serve, and the gracious Redeemer who has bought you with his blood.

But, above all things, let me entreat you, my brethren, not to rest satisfied in barren and speculative notions of the nature of sin. Let your views be the result of a close examination of yourselves by the word of God, accompanied by fervent prayer to the Spirit of God deeply to affect your hearts. The present is a peculiarly proper season for frequent retirement and devout humiliation: employ it to obtain deeper impressions of your guilt and sinfulness, and more sincere and abiding penitence. And doubt not that God will assist and bless you with his grace, that, "worthily lamenting your sins, and acknowledging your transgressions, you may obtain of Him, the God of all goodness, perfect remission and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

SERMON XII.

THE REASONS WHY MEN DO NOT COME TO CHRIST.

John v. 40.

Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

JESUS CHRIST declared that he came down from heaven for the express purpose of being a Saviour to man; that he was endued by God with the highest power; that the Father had committed all judgment to him; that he had life in himself, and was able to communicate life to whomsoever he pleased; that even the dead in their graves should hear his voice, and come forth to receive his sentence; and that whosoever now heard his word, and believed on Him that sent him, should have everlasting life, and should not come into condemnation, but was already passed from death unto life. Nor were these idle declarations; on the contrary every possible attestation was given to their truth, and to his power and dignity. John, whom the Jews believed to be a prophet, a burning and shining light, bare witness of him;—the Father bare witness of him.

by the miracles which he enabled him to perform;—the Scriptures testified of him: they clearly foretold his coming, and pointed out his character. And yet, notwithstanding the most gracious invitations on his part, notwithstanding the beneficent design upon which he came, notwithstanding these testimonies given to the truth of his claims, he complains, “Ye,” that is, the great body of the Jews, “will not come to me, that ye might have life.” Some did, indeed, believe on him, and “come” to him: but the bulk of the people neither believed on him nor applied to him for a share in these great blessings which he offered.

How is this indifference on the part of the people to be accounted for? It may be accounted for, I conceive, on three suppositions:

I. Either they placed no value on the blessings which he offered; or,

II. They had no confidence in his power to grant them; or,

III. They had objections to the terms upon which he offered them.

One or other of these suppositions will, I think, satisfactorily account for every instance, both in that and the present day, in which the gracious invitations of Christ are not accepted.

I. Men place no value on the blessings which Christ offers to them.

The blessings which Christ offers possess, in the eyes of multitudes, two great disadvantages: they are *remote*, and they are of a *spiritual nature*.

1. They are *remote*: He offers eternal life after death.—But what is this to the man who never looks so far as death, whose very hope and joy centre on this side the grave, who is wholly engaged about worldly things, who cares about nothing but to-day and the present scene? We all know but too painfully, the vast influence which present things have over us, in comparison with those which are remote. It is in vain that our judgment informs us that future things will soon be

present, and that it is the extreme of folly to barter away ages of future happiness for days or moments of present enjoyment: such is the impaired state of our minds through the Fall, that even a conviction of this truth makes little impression upon us. We are creatures of feeling, rather than of reasoning; and we are, in general, far too strongly affected by present cares, present enjoyments, present business, present interest, to pay much attention to the hopes or fears, the perils or enjoyments, of a period which, we trust, may be yet thirty or forty, or perhaps fifty, years distant.

2. In like manner, the blessing which Christ offers are of a *spiritual* nature.—Now all we see in this word contributes to rivet our thoughts upon things visible, things which affect the senses. These are the only objects about which we are naturally interested; and all the business of life, and all the pleasures of life, all that we see around us, and all that we hear in conversation, tend to keep up the too strong attachment we feel to things worldly and temporal. Religion, on the contrary, is conversant only about spiritual things. An unseen world; an invisible God; pains, which though eternal, are remote and unfelt; pleasures which spring from a pure and celestial source—these are the objects which she holds out to us, and for the sake of which she commands us to wean our affections from things below, and to fix them upon things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. And, agreeably to this view of religion, Jesus Christ came with little about him to attract the eye of sense, or to charm the mind that is fond of outward splendour. There was no form or comeliness in him, and no beauty of an earthly kind, that he should be desired. He neither taught how to obtain money, nor to gain reputation, nor to acquire power; but, on the contrary commanded his disciples to renounce the love of these things; to be dead to the world; to be indifferent to its censures or praises: to choose as their object the favour of God; to cultivate holiness as their pursuit; to be

heavenly-minded, and to live a life of faith. How, then, could he be much regarded by the world? Their tastes were not congenial. An Alexander would have had admirers and followers; an earthly Messiah would not have wanted numerous disciples; but neither the life which Jesus led, nor the objects which he pursued, nor the doctrines which he taught, were calculated to make any impression on the world at large. And, at this day, what effect are the doctrines of Christ likely to produce on the generality who hear them? They proclaim *pardon of sin* to the penitent: but what is this to those who are not penitent? The bulk of mankind think very little about their sins, and suffer no uneasiness on their account: they feel no painful apprehensions lest they should not be forgiven by God: they are not alarmed lest they themselves should perish eternally: these are not matters which ever seriously occupy their thoughts; and therefore of what use is a Saviour to them? In like manner, Christ promises to his true disciples *peace of conscience*, and a *joyful hope* of immortality: but of what value are such promises to those whose consciences are not disturbed: and who neither care about immortality nor have any real desire for the kind of happiness which is enjoyed in heaven? He promises, also, to give *grace* and *holiness*: but these are blessings for which they have no taste: they are not pursuing them: they are taking no pains whatever to obtain them: on the contrary, they would look upon the restraints of religion as burthensome, and its pleasures as dull: a holy and godly life may even be to them a subject of contempt and ridicule. How, then, can they come to Christ in order to obtain from him the benefits which he offers? The most which can be expected from them is, to pay to him a cold and formal kind of respect, in order that, perhaps, he may be of use to them hereafter, if there should be any such solemn account to be rendered, or any such punishment of sin to be inflicted, as the Scriptures seem to declare.

Alas, my brethren! do I not address some in this place whose consciences now bear witness that the state of their minds is such as I have described it; and that they are prevented by a different taste, by different pursuits and inclinations, from paying any particular attention to Christ, to his invitations, promises, or precepts? Yet, if Christianity is true, is not such attention to him absolutely necessary? Nothing can be more plain, than that Christ must possess an absolute dominion over his disciples, if they would receive any lasting benefit from him. He requires a total change of heart and conduct, the entire conformity of the whole man to his own standard, in order to the enjoyment of those blessings which he came down from heaven to communicate. Whilst therefore, you continue in your present state of alienation from Christ, you can entertain no hope of his favour. This, indeed, may not now give you much concern; but reflect, I entreat you, that our stay in this transitory world cannot be very long, and that then we shall be called to give an account of ourselves to God. What then should we give to have an interest, a well founded hope in Christ? How little will all our worldly pursuits, which have passed away like a dream, appear, when eternity, with all its great and important realities, opens upon our view! Be wise, then, I earnestly entreat you. Reflect upon eternity; labour for eternity. Secure to yourselves an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Let not the few moments of your existence here engross all your time and thoughts: you were born to higher views—you have immortality before you! Provide, then, for an eternal life: cordially embrace that salvation which the Son of God now offers to you, that in the world to come you may not appear ashamed and confounded, having made no provision but for this perishing life, and for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts.

II. But I pass on to a second cause, which will account for the indifference many have shewn to the invitations of Jesus Christ: they *have no confidence in*

the power of Christ to grant the blessings which he promises.

Far the greater number of persons, I allow, are indifferent to Christ from the cause already stated; namely because they have no value for the blessings which he offers to communicate: and this cause operates in producing that want of confidence in his power of which I am now to treat. For if men were truly alive to the impressions of another world; if they were properly affected by the dread of perishing eternally, or were as deeply interested as they ought to be in endeavouring to secure the favour of God; there would be, comparatively, little hesitation in embracing the salvation of Christ. To a mind so prepared, the Gospel of Christ would soon approve itself, by incontestable evidences, as coming from God, and worthy of all acceptance. But when the mind is not sufficiently in earnest, it is very apt to rest satisfied with superficial views and unfounded expectations, and to entertain prejudices which might easily be shewn to be entirely groundless.

When our blessed Lord came on earth, there appeared little in him to strike a superficial observer, or to captivate a mind which was not already deeply impressed with the importance of eternity. "Who is this man," they would say, "who promises such great things? What evidence have we that he comes from God, or is indeed constituted the Judge of the whole earth; for to outward appearance he seems only to be a man, and a man poor and unlearned? Have any of the Scribes or Pharisees believed in him? Do we see the wise men of the world pay him homage? Do the great pay their court to him? Can he be the Son of God, the only Mediator between God and man, who appears among us so entirely divested of all pomp and power? And, especially, when we see him put to death as a malefactor, can we believe this man to be the only Saviour of the world?" Thus would they be offended at him.

Now a greater degree of earnestness about their eternal state, and deeper reflection, would have shewn

them that Jesus was exactly the kind of character which the Son of God might be expected to exhibit when upon earth:—careless about worldly things; intent only upon heavenly things; jealous for the honour of his Father's law; regardless of the honour paid to himself; proving himself to be a Divine person by such testimonies as would strike the most forcibly a person deeply serious about religion; and commending himself, particularly to all those who were much interested in the pardon of their sins, by declarations suited to their state. Hence a pious Nicodemus, and a devout Nathanael, on the one hand; and, on the other, a penitent Mary, and a number even of publicans and gross sinners; received him gladly, and believed in him; while the proud hypocritical Pharisees, the gay courtiers, and the rich and great, were generally offended at him, and spurned at his pretensions.

It requires a very deep sense of the holiness of God, of the sinfulness of man, and the awfulness of standing in judgment before the Divine tribunal, in order justly to value such a Saviour as Jesus Christ. He is a Saviour of sinners; making atonement for sin, by the sacrifice of his own most precious life; and rising again, to intercede in the courts of heaven for those who should believe on him. Now it is evident, that, where the mind is either not sensible of its sin, or not convinced of its need of such a Mediator and Sacrifice as the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be little disposition to come to him, and to build all our hopes upon him. Hence those persons who think themselves comparatively *innocent*—as too many do, who neither know themselves nor the strictness of the law of God—will place no proper reliance on Christ. Their confidence is reposed in their own virtue and innocence. Those, also, who like the Pharisees of old, and like some devotees of the present day, rely solely, as a compensation for sin, on a round of forms and ceremonies, and on a punctual attendance at church, without the essential dispositions which the Gospel requires, are disqualified from com-

ing to Christ as the only Saviour: they substitute, in his place, a mere ceremonial righteousness. Those, also, who have formed, as too many now do, loose and unfounded conceptions of the mercy of God, as if he were so indulgent to the frailties and sins of his creatures as readily to overlook them; or who entertain such slight thoughts of the evil of sin as to think it of no great importance, and that it is sufficiently punished by the evil consequences which usually follow it; such persons are necessarily indisposed for receiving Christ as the only Saviour and Mediator between God and man. Those, in like manner, who conceive that repentance is of itself available for the remission of sins, and that all the ends of the Divine administration are answered when the offender is brought to see the necessity of avoiding sin for the future, are indisposed to come to Christ, and to regard his death as an atonement for their sins, or to trust in him as their Intercessor with God. They may look with much respect on the character of Christ as a Teacher of righteousness, and admire the example which he set to mankind; but they will not come to him "that they may have life." To repose proper confidence in Christ, requires a conviction, founded first upon the testimony of Revelation, and confirmed by the clearest evidence of miracles, that Jesus Christ was the Son of the Most High God; that he was sent into the world both to teach mankind the way of salvation, and to make expiation for their sins by his death; that he is the only Saviour, and that none can come unto the Father but by him: and this conviction must meet with a suitable frame of mind, with a corresponding sense of our sinfulness, and of our need of such a Saviour. True faith in Christ is founded on the union of this conviction with this frame of mind, and wherever they are found together, there will be found also a cordial acceptance of Christ, a supreme devotedness to him, and a perfect reliance upon him, as able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him. Christ will then be all in all to the soul; the

wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation: he will be "made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

III. We have thus endeavoured to point out two general causes why men do not come to Christ: they do not value the blessings which he offers, or they do not place sufficient confidence in his power and ability. But to these a third must also be added.—they *object to the terms upon which he offers them salvation.*

When our Lord was upon earth, we find him using such expressions as these:—that a man must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, in order to follow him; that a man must (comparatively speaking) hate his father and mother, yea, and his own life also, else he cannot be his disciple: that is, that a man must feel such a supreme attachment to Christ as to be ready, for his sake, to risk the displeasure of relations, or the loss even of life—that a man must pluck out the right eye, and cut off the right hand, in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven; that is, that a man must make sacrifices of lusts and tempers which will be as painful to part with as it would be to cut off a right hand, or pluck out a right eye. And hence we find that many were offended at the strictness of his doctrines: some said, "Who then can be saved?" others "left him, and walked no more with him." Now, if Christ would undertake to save men by the merit of his death and his intercession with the Father, requiring nothing on their part, but permitting them to live as they pleased, there is no question but that all men would be glad to come to Christ on these terms: but it is most plain that he requires repentance, and that universally: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." He requires that his disciples shall be pure and holy, shall mortify the flesh, with its lusts and affections; shall not be of the world, even as he was not of the world; shall become new creatures in him, putting on a new character and being renewed after the image of him who redeemed them; and shall live to the praise and glory of

God, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. Whatever, therefore, is said of coming to Christ, must be said consistently with these representations: that is to say, whoever comes to Christ, or becomes a true disciple of his, must have this character in view, and must be sincerely desirous of being what Christ requires all his disciples to be, even holy as he was holy. It is very true that there is no way of attaining this holiness but through his grace and power, and that we must apply to him for that grace and power to be communicated to us; but still the fact remains the same; holiness is necessary: and those, therefore, who are unholy in heart, who are still attached to the love of sin, cannot sincerely come to Christ in his own appointed way. This then, forms one very common obstacle to the reception of Christ: men will not give up their sins, nor sacrifice their beloved lusts. They would be glad of the blessing, but they do not like the terms of obtaining it. Some besetting sin cleaves to them, and prevents their coming to Christ with a full and unreserved surrender of themselves to him. The world, which has long been their master, still retains its power over them, and they attempt to serve two opposite masters. This is generally the case where the mind is not very deeply affected by the sense of sin and the importance of eternal things. Where it is, where the favour of God is considered as the greatest—indeed, the only—blessing; where sin is felt as the evil, the plague, and the curse of man; where the danger of perishing is felt in all its tremendous magnitude; where this world appears in its true form, as an empty unsatisfying portion; where the next world is beheld in its true light, as a state of infinite and most important existence; there is no hesitation to comply with all that Christ demands, no shameful compromise between his service and that of sin, no reluctance to give to him the whole heart: there, Christ is readily and cordially embraced, as the Saviour from the guilt of sin, and what is, if possible, still more highly prized, as the Deliverer from its pow-

er. Salvation from the dominion of sin is the very thing which the soul desires, and Christ is joyfully received, because he will communicate it to the soul.

I have thus stated the principal causes which operate to prevent men from coming to Christ; and I cannot, upon a review of them, but be painfully affected with considering how many classes of persons must evidently be included as acting under their influence. It is, indeed, too true, that though a Saviour is come into the world, though the world was made by him, it has not known him; a great part even of those who are called by his name, are entirely strangers to him, and, through one or other of the causes which I have enumerated, receive none of the benefits which he came to convey. They remain in the same state as if no Saviour had visited the world. Nay, their state is in some respects worse: had there been no Saviour, they would not have been chargeable with the guilt of neglecting him; for there is a wide difference between having no Saviour provided for us, and rejecting the offered mediation of the only Son of God. O that they would seriously reflect upon this, and, ere it be too late, would consider the infinite advantage of having such a great and glorious offer of salvation made to them!

Indeed, when I consider the nature of the complaint made by Christ, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," I see in it every thing to encourage the sinful children of men to draw nigh to him. It is the complaint of a person who would be gracious to sinners; who would readily receive them; who delights to pardon sin, and to shew mercy to offenders; and who deeply feels the want of suitable regard and attention to his offers. And every thing in the history and character of Christ plainly shews this to be the case. What, but a most deep compassion for sinners, could move him to leave his Father's throne and to take upon him the form of a servant? What, but such matchless pity, could enable him to suffer such indigni-

ties as he met with, or to suffer such a painful death upon the cross? What does his whole character speak, but tenderness and love? Every miracle which he performed was calculated to give so high an idea of his tenderness and love to man, as of his Divine power. Listen to all his discourses, and what do they indicate, but a spirit of good-will to man, of compassion for sinners, of generosity and forgiveness, as manifest as his regard for his Father's law?

Does it, then, not appear, upon the review of his character, that he is exactly that High Priest who became us: one who can be touched with compassion for the ignorant, and for them that are out of the way; one who delights to execute his office of making intercession for sinners? And what was the Gospel which he commanded his disciples to preach universally, but love and good will to man, glad tidings of great joy? "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God; for he hath made Him to be sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Impressed by this affecting, but just, representation of the willingness of Christ to receive all that truly come to him, I would earnestly entreat and conjure you, my brethren, if you have any sense of the awfulness of appearing at the judgment seat of God; if you have any consideration of the importance of eternity; if you feel any dread of the terrors of the Lord, and the dreadfulfulness of eternal torments: if you have ever reflected on the joy and happiness of heaven, and desired to enter into the seats of eternal bliss; if you ever felt the pangs of an accusing conscience, and the dread of the displeasure of the Most High;—I beseech you, by all these considerations, that you would not delay to come to that Saviour, who is equally able and willing to deliver you from the wrath to come, and to communicate to you eternal life.

"But what do you mean," it may be asked, "by coming to Christ? How are we to come to him?" I answer, To come to Christ is to make application to him,

as a Saviour, in fervent prayer. But, then, it is not to be supposed that this is all; that it is enough that you pray to Christ to receive you. This application to him, if sincere, will be necessarily attended with other things, and you will study his word, and be desirous of doing every thing which he has commanded. You will, in a word, receive Christ as your Lord and Master, to direct you by his precepts, and to rule in you by his Spirit; and, at the same time, you will rely upon him, according to his word, to give you grace and strength to keep his law, and to make intercession on your behalf. And let me entreat you thus to come to him without delay. Be assured, he will cast out none that call upon him. You feel, I doubt not, in some degree, the tyranny and the evil of sin: you are sensible, in some degree, of your guilt. Let this lead you to throw yourselves at your Saviour's feet, and to surrender yourselves to his guidance and help. He will then strengthen you to persevere, if you continue to call upon him and to seek his aid. Be persuaded that he is of great mercy, and rejoices to execute his office as a Saviour of sinners. Millions have experienced the saving efficacy of his grace, and why should any despair of obtaining it? Delay not, then, to obtain an interest in his grace. Salvation is indispensably necessary: it is freely offered by the Son of God: the offer is made to you; let it not be said to you, by Christ, at the last great day, "You would not come to me, that you might have life."

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Venn. Rev. John, M.A.

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